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Abstract: We present comprehensive photometric and spectroscopic observations of the faint transient SN 2008S discovered in the nearby galaxy NGC 6946. SN 2008S exhibited slow photometric evolution and almost no spectral variability during the first nine months, implying a long photon diffusion time and a high-density circumstellar medium. Its bolometric luminosity (1041 erg s^{-1} at peak) is low with respect to most core-collapse supernovae but is comparable to the faintest Type II-P events. Our quasi-bolometric light curve extends to 300 d and shows a tail phase decay rate consistent with that of ^{56}Co . We propose that this is evidence for an explosion and formation of ^{56}Ni ($0.0014 \pm 0.0003 M_{\odot}$). Spectra of SN 2008S show intense emission lines of H, [Ca ii] doublet and Ca ii near-infrared (NIR) triplet, all without obvious P-Cygni absorption troughs. The large mid-infrared (MIR) flux detected shortly after explosion can be explained by a light echo from pre-existing dust. The late NIR flux excess is plausibly due to a combination of warm newly formed ejecta dust together with shock-heated dust in the circumstellar environment. We reassess the progenitor object detected previously in Spitzer archive images, supplementing this discussion with a model of the MIR spectral energy distribution. This supports the idea of a dusty, optically thick shell around SN 2008S with an inner radius of nearly 90 au and outer radius of 450 au, and an inferred heating source of 3000 K. The luminosity of the central star is $L = 104.6 L_{\odot}$. All the nearby progenitor dust was likely evaporated in the explosion leaving only the much older dust lying further out in the circumstellar environment. The combination of our long-term multiwavelength monitoring data and the evidence from the progenitor analysis leads us to support the scenario of a weak electron-capture supernova explosion in a super-asymptotic giant branch progenitor star (of initial mass $6\text{--}8 M_{\odot}$) embedded within a thick circumstellar gaseous envelope. We suggest that all of main properties of the electron-capture SN phenomenon are observed in SN 2008S and future observations may allow a definitive answer.

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SN 2008S: an electron capture SN from a super-AGB progenitor?

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ABSTRACT

We present comprehensive photometric and spectroscopic observations of the faint transient SN 2008S discovered in the nearby galaxy NGC 6946. SN 2008S exhibited slow photometric evolution and almost no spectral variability during the first nine months, implying a long photon diffusion time and a high density circumstellar medium. The lightcurve is similar in shape to that of SN 1998S and SN 1979C, although significantly fainter at maximum light. Its bolometric luminosity ($\simeq 10^{41}$ erg s⁻¹ at peak) is low with respect to most core collapse supernovae but is comparable to the faintest type II-P events. Our quasi-bolometric lightcurve extends to 300 days and shows a tail phase decay rate consistent with that of ⁵⁶Co. We propose that this is evidence for an explosion and formation of ⁵⁶Ni. The mass of ⁵⁶Ni synthesized by SN 2008S is $0.0015 \pm 0.0004 M_{\odot}$. Spectra of SN 2008S show intense emission lines of H α , [Ca II] doublet and Ca II NIR triplet, all without obvious P-Cygni absorption troughs. The large mid-infrared (MIR) flux detected shortly after explosion can be explained by a light echo from pre-existing dust. The late near-infrared (NIR) flux excess is plausibly due to a combination of warm newly-formed ejecta dust, either radioactively or reverse-shock heated, together with shock-heated dust in the circumstellar environment. We reassess the progenitor object detected previously in Spitzer archive images, supplementing this discussion with a model of the MIR spectral energy distribution using the radiative transfer model DUSTY. This supports the idea of a dusty, optically thick shell around SN 2008S with an inner radius of nearly 90AU and outer radius of 450AU, and an inferred heating source of 3000 K. The luminosity of the central star is $L \simeq 10^{4.6} L_{\odot}$. All the nearby progenitor dust was likely evaporated in the explosion leaving only the much older dust lying further out in the circumstellar environment. The combination of our long term multi-wavelength monitoring data and the evidence from the progenitor analysis leads us to support the scenario of a weak electron capture supernova explosion in a super-AGB progenitor star (of initial mass 6-8 M_{\odot}) embedded within a thick circumstellar gaseous envelope. We suggest that all of main properties of

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years deeper and more frequent searches for transient events and stellar explosions in the local and distant Universe have provided us with important information on the evolution of the most massive stars. However, the simplicity of the emerging picture is compromised by the growing number of peculiar events (e.g. Kulkarni et al. 2007; Smith et al. 2007; Quimby et al. 2007).

From an observational point of view, the challenge is to decide when the introduction of new classes is required or if peculiar or novel transients are just variations of an understood scheme. The discovery of some low energy events (in terms of their bolometric luminosity and kinetic energies) leads us to investigate in more detail the observational differences between explosive (core collapse, pair instability explosions) and eruptive (pair instability pulsation, outburst) transients.

From a theoretical point of view, recent observations demonstrate that the standard scenario of stellar evolution and explosion physics may not be complete. Both the extremely bright type II SNe (Woosley et al. 2007; Langer et al. 2007) and the faint type II SNe (Smith et al. 2008; Bond et al. 2009; Berger et al. 2009) have been proposed to have physical origins other than the core-collapse of a degenerate Fe (or O-Ne-Mg) core.

SN 2008S is one of the most intriguing transient events discovered in recent years. Although it has been given a supernova designation, (which we will employ in this paper) it is not yet certain that it was a supernova of the canonical core-collapse type. The transient was discovered in NGC 6946 by Arbour & Boles (2008) on February 1.78 UT with a 30-cm f/6.3 Schmidt-Cassegrain reflector at about 17.6 mag. Eight confirming images of SN2008S were taken on February 2.76 UT, yielding a magnitude of 17.1. Furthermore, Arbour (2008) provided a new image of SN 2008S acquired on 2008 January 24 UT (17.8 mag) and Schmeer (2008) reported an image obtained on 2008 January 30.529 (16.7 mag). The transient was classified as a young reddened Type II_n SN by Stanishev et al. (2008) based on a low resolution spectrum taken at the Nordic Optical Telescope, with narrow H β and H α emission lines and strong Na I D doublet. Steele et al. (2008) reported a new spectrum of SN 2008S obtained on Feb. 29 UT with the 3-m Shane reflector equipped with Kast double spectrograph at the Lick Observatory, and suggested SN 2008S to be a "SN impostor" based on peculiar spectral properties and the very faint absolute visual magnitude.

Remarkably, a bright point-like source coincident with SN 2008S was detected in archival Spitzer MIR images by Prieto et al. (2008). They found no optical counterpart to this precursor and suggested this MIR source was a stellar progenitor with mass of about 10 M_{\odot} and luminosity of $\sim 3.5 \times 10^4 L_{\odot}$, enshrouded in its own dust. The stellar mass and the total luminosity estimates result from a black-body fit to the MIR spectral energy distribution (SED) of the progenitor star. Shortly afterwards, another transient was discovered in the nearby galaxy NGC 300 which bears a striking resemblance to SN 2008S (Berger et al. 2009; Bond et al. 2009). Thompson et al. (2008) reported the discovery of a similar progenitor star in Spitzer MIR prediscovery images and again an optical counterpart was lacking. They suggested that both transients share a common evolutionary channel and also that the optical transient discovered in M 85 was of similar origin (Kulkarni et al. 2007; Pastorello et al. 2007). Thompson et al. (2008) and Prieto et al. (2008) have proposed that these events could be low energy electron-capture SNe (ECSNe) from stars of initial mass around 9 M_{\odot} . The existence of such explosions has

Table 1. Properties of NGC6946.

α (2000)	20 ^h 34 ^m 52 ^s .3	1
δ (2000)	60°09'14"	1
Galactic longitude	95.72°	1
Galactic latitude	+11.67°	1
morphological type	SAB(rs)cd	1
Position angle	242°	2
Inclination angle	38 \pm 2°	2
M_B	-21.38 mag	3
L_B	$5.3 \times 10^{10} L_{\odot}$	3
redshift	0.00016 \pm 0.000007	1
v_{Hel}	48 \pm 2 km s ⁻¹	1
$v_{galact.}$	275 \pm 9 km s ⁻¹	1
$v_{Virgo+GA+Shapley}^a$	410 \pm 19 km s ⁻¹	1
Galactic reddening	$E(B - V) = 0.342$ mag	4

1 NASA/IPAC Extragalactic Database (NED)

2 Boomsma et al. (2008)

3 Carignan et al. (1990)

4 Schlegel et al. (1998)

^a based on the local velocity field model given in Mould et al. (2000) using the terms for the influence of the Virgo Cluster, the Great Attractor, and the Shapley Supercluster.

been theoretically predicted for many years (Miyaji et al. 1980; Nomoto 1984; Miyaji & Nomoto 1987; Hashimoto et al. 1993; Kitaura et al. 2006; Poelarends et al. 2008). However, what exactly the mass range of the progenitors would be and how the SN evolution would appear is far from certain. The nature of these transients has not yet been firmly established, since recent works on SN 2008S (Smith et al. 2008) and NGC 300 OT2008-1 (Bond et al. 2009; Berger et al. 2009) suggest that these events are the outbursts of a massive star and not the cataclysmic stellar deaths of stars after core-collapse.

In this paper we present results from our extensive photometric and spectroscopic follow-up of SN 2008S, together with analysis of supernova and progenitor observations. The properties of the host galaxy are described in Sect. 2. Photometric and spectroscopic data reduction and analysis are detailed in Sect. 3 and 5, respectively. Sect. 4 illustrates the evolution of the spectral energy distribution of this transient. Sect. 6 is devoted to the analysis of the pre-explosion images and to the discussion of the progenitor star. A summary of our observations, a comparison with other underluminous transients and some type II-L SNe, and our conclusions on the nature of SN 2008S are given in Sect. 7.

2 HOST GALAXY, DISTANCE AND EXTINCTION

SN 2008S was discovered at $R.A. = 20^h 34^m 45^s.37$ and $Dec. = 60^{\circ}05'58''.3$ (2000), about 53 arcsec West and 196 arcsec South of the nucleus of NGC 6946. Details of the host galaxy obtained from the NASA/IPAC Extragalactic database¹ are summarised in Table 1.

Optical, far infrared, radio continuum and X-ray observations indicate vigorous star formation (SF) throughout the NGC 6946 disc, one of the highest among nearby spiral galaxies, a mild starburst at its centre, and an interstellar medium (ISM) stirred by SNe and stellar winds (Engargiola 1991; Boulanger & Viallefond 1992; Kamphuis & Sancisi 1993; Schlegel 1994; Lacey et al. 1997). This

¹ NASA/IPAC Extragalactic Database, <http://nedwww.ipac.caltech.edu/>

high level of SF in the disc of NGC 6946 has been attributed both to its strong spiral density wave (Tacconi & Young 1990) and to stochastic, self-propagating SF (Degioia-Eastwood et al. 1984). Signs of low level SF such as HII regions and UV bright clusters have been discovered in the far outer regions of galactic disc well beyond the R_{25} radius.

Eight other SNe have been detected in this galaxy six of which were classified as type II SNe (1917A (II), 1948B (II-P), 1968D (II) 1980K (II-L) 2002hh (II-P) 2004et (II-P)) and two remain unclassified (SN 1939C and SN 1969P). All these SNe were brighter than mag 15 except SN 2002hh which was highly reddened. Among these eight SNe, four have been detected as radio SNe (1968D, 1980K, 2002hh, 2004et) and three as X-ray SNe (1968D, 1980K, 2004et). Many SN remnants have been detected in NGC 6946 using optical, radio and X-ray telescopes (Matonick & Fesen 1997; Schlegel et al. 2000; Pannuti et al. 2007).

2.1 Metallicity

The galactic metallicity at the position of SN 2008S can be estimated in a similar way to that for two other recent SNe in this galaxy (SN 2002hh and SN 2004et) as shown by Smartt et al. (2009). The abundance gradient determined by Pilyugin et al. (2004) ($12 + \log O/H = 8.7 - 0.41(R/R_{25})$) and the de-projected galactocentric radius of the SN position can be used to determine the likely local metallicity at the position of SN 2008S. Using the distance of 5.7 Mpc as discussed in Sect. 2.2, SN 2008S is at a de-projected galactocentric radius of 4.9 kpc, and with $R_{25} = 9.1$ kpc (from HyperLeda² (Paturel et al. 2003)), the metallicity gradient of Pilyugin et al. (2004) results in an approximate oxygen abundance of 8.5 dex. On the Pilyugin et al. (2004) abundance scale, solar is approximately 8.7 dex. Hence the environment of SN 2008S is mildly sub-solar, although within the uncertainties in this method a solar-like composition of the progenitor is still quite possible. By comparison, the oxygen abundances estimated for SN 2002hh and SN 2004et are approximately 8.5 and 8.3 dex, respectively (Smartt et al. 2009).

2.2 Distance

There are several estimates of the distance to NGC 6946, obtained with different methods (Tully-Fisher relation, the "sosie galaxies" method, the planetary nebulae luminosity function) and listed in Table 2. Two SNe hosted in NGC 6946 have been used as distance indicators. Schmidt et al. (1994) applied the Expanding Photosphere Method (EPM) to SN 1980K and found a distance modulus of 28.78 ± 0.4 mag. Sahu et al. (2006) used a "standard candle method" (SCM) for SN 2004et, based on the correlation between the expansion velocities of the SN II-P ejecta and the bolometric luminosities during the plateau phase (Hamuy & Pinto 2002; Nugent et al. 2006). They obtained $\mu = 28.78$ mag, in close agreement with the estimate obtained with EPM for SN 1980K. There is one distance estimate that is significantly different from the rest: the radio observations of SN 1980K yield a much larger value of 30.5 ± 0.3 Mpc (Weiler et al. 1998). As this is much larger than the other estimates (which are consistent within the uncertainties) we shall discount this value and use an unweighted mean of 28.78 ± 0.08 mag throughout this paper.

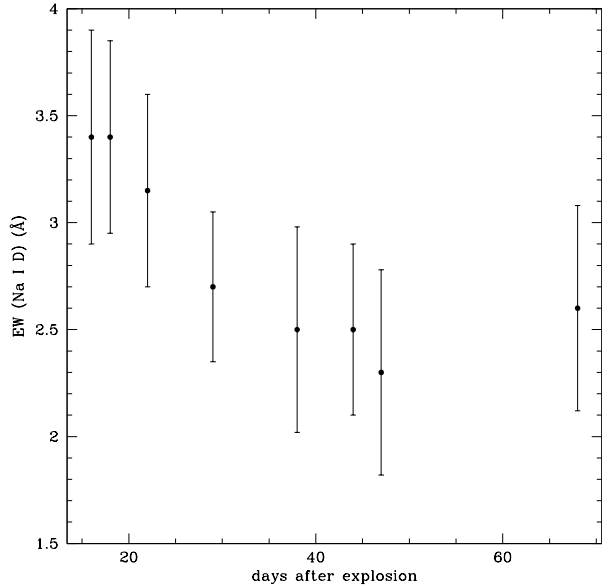


Figure 1. Temporal evolution of the EW(Na I D). Phase is in days after the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486).

Table 3. Measurements of the EW of Na I D.

JD ^a	ph ^b	EW (Å)
501	16	4.4 ± 0.50
504	19	3.4 ± 0.45
508	22	3.2 ± 0.45
514	28	2.7 ± 0.35
524	38	2.5 ± 0.48
530	44	2.5 ± 0.40
533	47	2.3 ± 0.48
554	68	2.6 ± 0.48

^aJD – 2 454 000.00

^b Phase is in days after the explosion date JD 2 454 486 \pm 4.

2.3 Extinction

NGC 6946 is located close to the Galactic plane (Galactic latitude $\sim 12^\circ$), with an estimated reddening of $E(B - V) = 0.342$ mag (Schlegel et al. 1998). For the SNe which occurred in this galaxy, different values of internal extinction have been estimated depending on the SN position. In all cases the presence of the Na I D ($\lambda\lambda 5890, 5896$) lines has been used as an indicator of the presence of dust and used to estimate the reddening at the SN position (Zwitter et al. 2004; Sahu et al. 2006; Meikle et al. 2006; Pozzo et al. 2006). Strong Na I D lines in absorption are also present in the SN 2008S spectra until about 70 days after the explosion. The EW(Na I D) appears to show a temporal evolution from 4.4 Å to 2.5 Å over about 70 days (Table 3 and Fig. 1).

To estimate the error in our EW measurements we performed a Monte-Carlo simulation adding a number of absorption lines with known EW at different positions in each SN spectrum and re-measured their EW. We repeated the simulation for different values of line EW and strength. These simulations were performed separately in each spectrum to take account of the differences in spectral resolution and S/N ratio. In order to investigate the reality

² HyperLeda database, <http://leda.univ-lyon1.fr>

Table 2. Estimates of the distance to NGC 6946.

Distance (Mpc)	Distance modulus (mag)	Method	Reference
5.5	28.70	HI Tully-Fisher relation	Pierce (1994)
5.4	28.66	CO Tully-Fisher relation	Schoniger & Sofue (1994)
6.0 ± 0.5	28.90 ± 0.18	galaxy brightest supergiants	Sharina et al. (1997)
5.9 ± 0.4	28.85 ± 0.15	brightest supergiants of group	Karachentsev et al. (2000)
5.6 ± 1.8	28.73 ± 0.68	“sosie galaxies”	Terry et al. (2002)
6.1 ± 0.6	28.92 ± 0.21	planetary nebulae luminosity function	Herrmann et al. (2008)
5.7 ± 0.7	28.78 ± 0.40	EMP SN 1980K	Schmidt et al. (1994)
5.7 ± 0.3	28.78 ± 0.11	SCM SN 2004et	Sahu et al. (2006)

of the EW changes in the Na I D lines, we carried out a quantitative statistical test, performing a linear fit to the data, and found a negative slope at the 2 sigma (95% confidence) level. To test further that the data are better represented by a temporally declining EW, rather than a fixed value, we exploited the Bayesian information criterion (BIC), which give an approximation for the Bayes factor (see Liddle 2004, and references therein). The BIC is defined as $\chi^2 + N_{\text{par}} \log N_{\text{data}}$ where χ^2 is the total χ^2 for the model, N_{par} is the number of parameters of the model and N_{data} is the number of data points used in the fit. The best model minimizes the BIC. A difference of 2 for the BIC is regarded as positive evidence, and of 6 or more as strong evidence, against the model with the larger value. The BIC corresponding to no evolution is larger by 6 than the BIC for a straight line with slope ($\Delta\text{BIC} = \text{BIC}_{\text{const}} - \text{BIC}_{\text{slope}} > 6$), clearly supporting the scenario for a decreasing temporal evolution. The two BIC values are comparable only if we exclude from the analysis the first two epochs. We conclude that we find evidence for a change in EW of the Na I D feature.

We conclude from these tests that the EW evolution is real. The evolution of the local component EW(Na I D) may be due to an evolution of the ionization conditions in the CSM and in the ejecta of SN 2008S since the EW is related to the ionization stage of Na I. By days 182 and 256 the Na I D feature has become visible in emission. This change is also indicative of the circumstellar origin of this feature. The evolution in the EW may also imply that the local extinction underwent a temporal decline. However, given (a) the lack of any well-established EW(Na I D)-extinction correlation at the very large EWs involved, and (b) the possibility that the Na I D feature includes saturated components, we make no attempt to use the EW(Na I D) to determine the extinction or its possible variation. In any case, the EW(Na I D) variation could be simply due to evolution of the physical properties of the gas around SN 2008S (see Sect. 5.2), with the extinction taking place at a completely different location.

The presence of circumstellar Na I D has also been observed in the type II in SN 1998S and has been interpreted as a signature of slow moving outflows originating from the progenitor while the bluishift and growing intensity between 20-40 days after explosion has been associated with variable physical conditions in the CSM (Bowen et al. 2000). Chugai & Utrobin (2008) studied the formation of the Na I D and Ca II H&K lines in the RSG wind after a SN II-P explosion with the goal of using these as a diagnostic of the wind density. They extrapolated their model to a very high wind density to reproduce the intensity of these lines observed in SN 1998S. However, the EW of the absorption depends non-monotonically on the wind density. The case of SN 1998S with its very dense wind has shown that the EW(Na I D) decreases with

wind density because of the ionization of metals in the wind by UV radiation.

Variable EW(Na I D) have been detected also in a few Type Ia SNe (2006X, Patat et al. (2007); 1999cl, Blondin et al. (2008); 2007le, Simon et al. in prep). However, this does not seem to be a very common phenomenon (Blondin et al. 2008) and the interpretation in terms of evolution of the CSM physical conditions induced by the SN radiation field (Patat et al. 2007) is still debatable (Chugai 2008).

Here we adopt the Galactic absorption in *V* band, $A_V = 1.13$ mag, calculated from the list of $A/E(B - V)$ of Schlegel et al. (1998) along with their estimate of $E(B - V)$ and an extinction local to the SN, $A_V \sim 1$ mag, required by our light echo model to fit the observed SED at ~ 20 days after explosion when the MIR excess is observed, (see Sect. 4.1). If we assume $A_V = 2.13$, the EW of K I (λ 7699) would be about 0.17 Å following the calibration by Munari & Zwitter (1997). Unfortunately, the K I region of the spectrum lies close to strong telluric absorption (λ 7570-7750) and is only ever covered at low resolution so we did not observe the K I feature.

3 PHOTOMETRIC DATA AND ANALYSIS

We commenced monitoring SN 2008S shortly after the discovery epoch and collected data for the following eight months with a sampling rate among the highest ever obtained for such a peculiar transient. Data obtained before the discovery date by several amateur astronomers are also included to constrain the explosion epoch of SN 2008S. The unfiltered image acquired by D. Abraham on January 16 (JD 2 454 482) shows no object visible in the SN 2008S location with a limiting magnitude of 19.20 in *V* band (18.60 in *R* band), while the first detection of SN 2008S is eight days later on January 24 (JD 2 454 490). We therefore adopt January 20 (JD 2 454 486) as the explosion epoch, the uncertainty being about 4 d. The phases in this paper are relative to the explosion date (when we fix $\text{ph}=0$).

3.1 Optical data

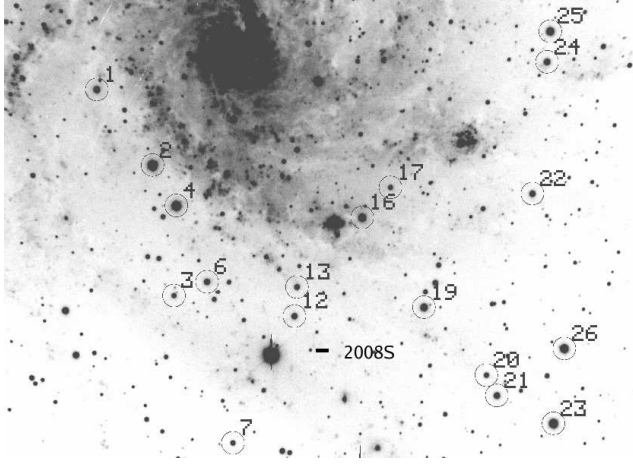
Optical photometry of SN 2008S was obtained with many telescopes and a summary of their characteristics is given in Table 4. Unfiltered images were obtained for many epochs with a 40 cm telescope with a SXVF H9 camera, a 30 cm telescope with a MX916 camera, a 35 cm telescope with a ST-9E/9XE camera and with a 25 cm telescope with a ICX424 CCD.

Basic data reduction (overscan correction, bias subtraction, flat fielding, trimming) was performed using standard routines

Table 4. Summary of the characteristics of the telescopes used during the photometric follow up.

Telescope	Primary mirror m	Camera	array	CCD	pixel scale arcsec/pix	field of view arcmin	filters
TNGD	3.6	DOLORES	2048 × 2048	EEV 42-40	0.25	8.6 × 8.6	Johnson <i>U, B, V</i> ; Cousins <i>R, I</i>
TNGN	3.6	NICS	1024 × 1024	HgCdTe Hawaii	0.25	4.2 × 4.2	<i>JHK</i>
NOT	2.5	ALFOSC	2048 × 2048	EEV 42-40	0.19	6.4 × 6.4	Johnson <i>U, B, V, R</i>
CAHAT	2.2	CAFOS	2048 × 2048	SITe	0.53	16 × 16	Johnson <i>B, V, R, I</i>
LT	2.0	RATCam	2048 × 2048	EEV 42-40	0.13	4.6	Bessel <i>U, B, V</i> ; Sloan <i>r', i'</i>
CAO	1.8	AFOSC	1024 × 1024	TK1024AB	0.46	7.8	Bessel <i>B, V, R</i> ; Gunn <i>i</i>
SAO	1.0		2048 × 2048	EEV 42-40	0.48	8.3	Johnson <i>V</i>
AZT24	1.0	SWIRCAM	256 × 256	HgCdTe PICNIC	1.03	4.4	<i>JHK</i>
MSK	0.7	Apogee AP-7p	512 × 512	SITe	0.94	4	Johnson <i>B, V, I</i> ; Cousin <i>R</i>
MSKL	0.7	Apogee AP-7p	512 × 512	SITe	0.64	5.5	Johnson <i>B, V, I</i> ; Cousin <i>R</i>
CRM	0.6	Apogee AP-47p	1024 × 1024	Marconi47-10	0.71	6.1	Johnson <i>B, V, I</i> ; Cousin <i>R</i>
SLV	0.5	SBIG ST-10XME	2184 × 1472	KAF3200ME	1.12	20.6 × 13.9	Johnson <i>B, V</i> ; Cousin <i>R, I</i>
WOT	0.4	SBIG ST-10 XME	2184 × 1472	KAF3200ME	0.44	16.0 × 10.8	Sloan <i>r'</i>

TNGD = the Telescopio Nazionale Galileo (TNG) with the Device Optimized for the LOW RESolution (DOLORES); TNGN = the Telescopio Nazionale Galileo (TNG) with the Near Infrared Camera Spectrometer (NICS); NOT = the Nordic Optical Telescope (NOT) with the Andalucia Faint Object Spectrograph and Camera (ALFOSC); CAHAT = the 2.2 m telescope at Calar Alto Observatory (CAHA) with the Calar Alto Faint Object Spectrograph (CAFOS); LT = the Liverpool Telescope (LT) with the optical CCD camera RATCam; CAO = the Copernico telescope at Asiago Observatory with the Asiago Faint Object Spectrograph and Camera (AFOSC); SAO = the 1 m telescope of Special Astrophysical Observatory of Russian Academy of Sciences; AZT24 = the AZT 24 telescope at Campo Imperatore Observatory with SWIRCAM; MSK = the 70 cm telescope of the Sternberg Astronomical Institute in Moscow; MSKL = the 70 cm telescope of the Sternberg Astronomical Institute +focal reducing lens; CRM = the 60 cm reflector of the Sternberg Astronomical Institute Crimean laboratory; SLV = the 50 cm telescope of the Astronomical Institute of Slovak Academy of Sciences at Tatranska Lomnica; WOT = the 40 cm telescope at the Wendelstein Observatory

**Figure 2.** Finding chart for the local sequence of stars employed for the optical photometric calibration. The numbers are adopted from Pozzo et al. (2006).

in IRAF. The instrumental magnitudes were obtained with the point spread function (PSF) fitting technique using a custom made DAOPHOT based package (SNOOPY). We did not apply the template subtraction technique, since the host galaxy contamination is negligible around SN 2008S in the optical and in the NIR range.

The photometric calibration was carried out by a comparison with Landolt standard stars observed the same night when possible. As our local sequence of stars, we chose a subset of that adopted in Pozzo et al. (2006) for SN 2002hh, shown in Fig. 2 and calibrated it with respect to a number of Landolt standard fields on several photometric nights.

Our calibration is in agreement with that of Pozzo et al. (2006) with an average difference of 0.01 in the *V* and *I* bands and of 0.005 in the *R* band. The magnitudes of the calibrated local se-

quence, listed in Table A1, were subsequently used to measure the relative SN 2008S magnitude for each observation. The *UBVRI* magnitudes of SN 2008S are reported with their uncertainties estimated by combining in quadrature the error of the photometric calibration and the error in the PSF fitting in Table 5. The responses of the SXVF H9 camera used by A. Arbour, and the ST-9E/9XE camera used by M. Mobberly peak, respectively, in the *V* and *R* bands. Therefore, although strictly these cameras were unfiltered, we nevertheless list the magnitudes obtained in the *V* or *R* columns of Table 5.

3.2 Near Infrared data

The near infrared (NIR) photometry was obtained with the TNG with NICS and with the AZT 24 telescope with SWIRCAM, in the *JHK* filters (Table 4). The NIR images were reduced using standard IRAF routines, with the jittered exposures first median-combined to obtain sky images in each band. Jittered images were then sky subtracted, registered and finally combined. The instrumental magnitudes were measured on the combined images with the PSF fitting technique (SNOOPY package). Photometric calibration was carried out via relative 2MASS photometry of the same local sequence stars used for optical data. The NIR magnitudes of SN 2008S are listed in Table 5.

3.3 Photometric evolution and bolometric lightcurve

In Fig. 3 the *UBVRIJHK* light curves of SN 2008S are illustrated. These are characterised by a broad peak and a subsequent slow decline. In the *R* and *V* bands there is clearly a fast rise to peak shown by early observations from a range of amateur telescopes. The peak occurs progressively earlier from the blue to the red bands (Table 6). The absolute magnitudes at maximum (Table 6), calculated adopting $\mu = 28.78 \pm 0.08$ and correcting for

Table 5. Optical, Near Infrared and unfiltered photometry of SN 2008S.

JD ^a	ph ^b	<i>U</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>K</i>	Instrument
490.3	4			17.25 ± 0.20	16.66 ± 0.50					MX916+ ICX424 unfiltered
498.3	12			16.97 ± 0.30						MX916 unfiltered
501.3	15			16.95 ± 0.08	16.34 ± 0.05					SXVF-H9+ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
501.4	15				16.35 ± 0.01					NOT
502.2	16		17.92 ± 0.16	16.87 ± 0.12	16.32 ± 0.08	15.87 ± 0.07				MKS
503.3	17			16.88 ± 0.10	16.39 ± 0.05					SXVF-H9+ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
505.3	19			16.98 ± 0.14	16.33 ± 0.06					SXVF-H9+ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
506.3	20				16.26 ± 0.06					SXVF-H9+ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
507.8	22	17.89 ± 0.04	17.77 ± 0.03	16.91 ± 0.01	16.35 ± 0.02	15.79 ± 0.02				TNGD
508.3	22			17.10 ± 0.14	16.36 ± 0.06					SXVF-H9+ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
508.7	23		17.81 ± 0.30	16.90 ± 0.50	16.37 ± 0.04	15.86 ± 0.07				CAHAT
509.3	23			17.12 ± 0.14	16.44 ± 0.11					SXVF-H9+ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
510.3	24			17.10 ± 0.14						SXVF-H9 unfiltered
512.3	26			17.08 ± 0.12	16.42 ± 0.09					SXVF-H9+ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
514.3	28			16.99 ± 0.13						SXVF-H9 unfiltered
514.7	29		17.91 ± 0.03	17.00 ± 0.01	16.48 ± 0.01	15.91 ± 0.01				CAO
515.3	29			17.06 ± 0.40						SXVF-H9 unfiltered
515.8	30	18.26 ± 0.10	17.89 ± 0.03	17.01 ± 0.02	16.47 ± 0.01	15.91 ± 0.01				LT
517.3	32				16.52 ± 0.08	16.03 ± 0.13				MKS
522.7	37		17.98 ± 0.01	17.10 ± 0.01	16.57 ± 0.01	16.11 ± 0.02				CAHAT
523.2	37		18.15 ± 0.14	17.08 ± 0.07	16.61 ± 0.04	16.20 ± 0.06				MKS
523.3	37			17.05 ± 0.08	16.54 ± 0.07					SXVF-H9+ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
524.7	39	> 18.70	18.04 ± 0.06	17.18 ± 0.02	16.67 ± 0.02	16.10 ± 0.01				LT
525.7	40			17.13 ± 0.06						SXVF-H9 unfiltered
526.8	41						15.20 ± 0.09	15.16 ± 0.09	14.95 ± 0.1	TNGN
528.7	43			17.22 ± 0.11						SXVF-H9 unfiltered
530.3	44			17.25 ± 0.12						SXVF-H9 unfiltered
530.8	45	18.90 ± 0.15	18.22 ± 0.05	17.37 ± 0.03	16.75 ± 0.03	16.20 ± 0.02				LT
532.7	47		18.39 ± 0.02	17.38 ± 0.01	16.83 ± 0.01	16.26 ± 0.02				CAHAT
533.3	47				16.65 ± 0.11					ST-9E/9XE unfiltered
537.6	52		18.46 ± 0.11	17.46 ± 0.05	16.91 ± 0.03	16.45 ± 0.04				SLV
539.7	54		18.59 ± 0.01	17.57 ± 0.02	16.99 ± 0.02	16.41 ± 0.01				LT
543.6	57				17.15 ± 0.05	16.55 ± 0.05				SLV
544.7	59				17.14 ± 0.04					NOT
546.6	61			17.88 ± 0.14	17.27 ± 0.10	16.70 ± 0.07				SLV
546.7	61						15.75 ± 0.10			AZT24
554.2	68		19.25 ± 0.08	17.96 ± 0.01	17.35 ± 0.02	16.70 ± 0.01				LT
555.5	69				17.31 ± 0.21					SLV
556.6	71			18.18 ± 0.09	17.44 ± 0.04	16.81 ± 0.05				SLV
556.6	71						16.00 ± 0.09	15.62 ± 0.09	15.39 ± 0.15	AZT24
556.7	71		19.30 ± 0.09	18.16 ± 0.02	17.43 ± 0.01	16.78 ± 0.01				CAO
557.7	72			18.15 ± 0.04	17.43 ± 0.04	16.77 ± 0.03				LT
570.7	84	20.92 ± 0.10	20.16 ± 0.07	18.63 ± 0.03	17.82 ± 0.02	17.11 ± 0.01				LT
572.7	86	20.93 ± 0.14	20.17 ± 0.04	18.78 ± 0.02	17.87 ± 0.01	17.16 ± 0.01				LT
573.6	87	20.93 ± 0.30	20.18 ± 0.09	18.79 ± 0.03	17.90 ± 0.01	17.14 ± 0.01	16.32 ± 0.08	15.96 ± 0.08	15.65 ± 0.09	TNGD,TNGN
574.6	88		20.13 ± 0.07	18.83 ± 0.03	18.03 ± 0.02	17.20 ± 0.02				LT
576.6	90		20.34 ± 0.14	18.82 ± 0.04	18.10 ± 0.03	17.32 ± 0.01				LT
577.6	91	21.01 ± 0.30	20.36 ± 0.01	18.97 ± 0.03	18.12 ± 0.02	17.33 ± 0.02				LT
579.5	93			19.10 ± 0.10	18.18 ± 0.10	17.33 ± 0.07				MKSL
582.6	96			19.15 ± 0.05						CAHAT
585.4	99			19.24 ± 0.30	18.35 ± 0.09	17.54 ± 0.08				MKSL
590.4	105				18.45 ± 0.11	17.67 ± 0.10				MKSL
590.7	105			19.51 ± 0.01	18.55 ± 0.01					LT
592.6	107		20.88 ± 0.09	19.57 ± 0.06	18.61 ± 0.03	17.80 ± 0.02				CAO
593.6	108	21.68 ± 0.20	21.07 ± 0.13	19.65 ± 0.05	18.67 ± 0.02	17.82 ± 0.02				TNGD
601.5	115				19.10 ± 0.2					WOT
602.2	116			20.06 ± 0.09	19.15 ± 0.04					LT
602.5	117				19.17 ± 0.47					MKSL
604.5	118				19.28 ± 0.37	18.10 ± 0.26				CRM
607.5	122			20.26 ± 0.26						CRM
607.7	122			20.27 ± 0.06	19.26 ± 0.04					LT
608.1	123			20.25 ± 0.11	19.35 ± 0.05					LT
613.4	127				19.39 ± 0.19	18.45 ± 0.15				MKSL
618.5	132			20.58 ± 0.21						SAO
619.5	133				19.45 ± 0.20					WOT
621.5	135			20.65 ± 0.27	19.49 ± 0.20	18.55 ± 0.08				CAO
627.6	142			20.93 ± 0.13	19.67 ± 0.07					LT
629.6	144						17.68 ± 0.06	16.72 ± 0.05	16.12 ± 0.05	TNGN
637.4	151			20.94 ± 0.14	19.87 ± 0.06	18.95 ± 0.03				LT
642.6	157			21.01 ± 0.21	19.94 ± 0.07	19.05 ± 0.04				LT
646.6	159		22.47 ± 0.22	21.08 ± 0.14	20.05 ± 0.09					CAHAT
648.4	162			21.18 ± 0.30	20.02 ± 0.07	19.07 ± 0.07				LT
651.5	165			21.30 ± 0.30	20.06 ± 0.05	19.07 ± 0.05				LT
658.5	172			21.34 ± 0.28	20.15 ± 0.08	19.13 ± 0.05				LT
659.5	174						17.77 ± 0.06	16.75 ± 0.08	16.05 ± 0.08	TNGN
667.5	181				20.21 ± 0.26	19.24 ± 0.32				LT
672.4	186			21.52 ± 0.15	20.27 ± 0.05	19.34 ± 0.05				LT
677.4	191			21.53 ± 0.23	20.28 ± 0.06	19.33 ± 0.04				LT
697.5	212						17.99 ± 0.10	16.78 ± 0.09	16.00 ± 0.08	TNGN
714.4	228			22.09 ± 0.30	20.75 ± 0.11	19.65 ± 0.10	18.14 ± 0.10	16.89 ± 0.1	15.90 ± 0.1	TNGN,TNGD
782.4	296			22.85 ± 0.30	21.30 ± 0.20	20.30 ± 0.10				LT
790.4	304						18.85 ± 0.10	17.20 ± 0.05	15.82 ± 0.05	TNGN

Table 6. Epochs, apparent and absolute magnitudes of light curve maximum in the *BVRI* bands.

Filter	JD ^a	ph ^b	m _{max}	M _{max}
<i>B</i>	509 ± 2	23	17.83 ± 0.05	−13.76 ± 0.16
<i>V</i>	505 ± 2	19	16.95 ± 0.05	−13.97 ± 0.16
<i>R</i>	503 ± 2	17	16.33 ± 0.05	−14.17 ± 0.16
<i>I</i>	502 ± 3	16	15.85 ± 0.05	−14.20 ± 0.16

^aJD − 2 454 000.00^bPhase in days with respect to the explosion date JD 2 454 486 ± 4.**Table 7.** Decline rates in the *BVRIJHK* bands.

Filter	ph ₁ ^a	γ ₁ (mag/100d)	ph ₂ ^a	γ ₂ (mag/100d)
<i>B</i>	50-100	4.5 ± 0.10	100-160	2.8 ± 0.10
<i>V</i>	50-120	4.0 ± 0.05	140-300	1.3 ± 0.06
<i>R</i>	60-120	3.4 ± 0.05	140-300	1.0 ± 0.05
<i>I</i>	60-120	2.8 ± 0.05	140-300	0.93 ± 0.06
<i>J</i>	40-120	2.4 ± 0.10	140-310	0.7 ± 0.05
<i>H</i>	40-120	1.5 ± 0.10	140-310	0.4 ± 0.10
<i>K</i>	40-120	1.5 ± 0.09	140-310	−0.2 ± 0.06

^aPhase in days with respect to the explosion date JD 2 454 486 ± 4.

Galactic ($A_V = 1.13$) and internal extinction ($A_V = 1$), reveal that SN 2008S is brighter by 1-1.5 mag than the NGC 300 OT2008-1 and M 85 OT2006-1 transients with which it has been compared (see Sect. 7.3).

The *BVRI* light curves show very similar temporal evolutions with three phases characterized by a different decline rate: a broad peak (about two weeks), a phase of steeper decline (γ_1 in Table 7) starting about 60 days after explosion, more pronounced at shorter wavelengths, and a flattening (γ_2) after 140 days, more evident at longer wavelengths. Due to the faintness of SN 2008S we do not have *U* and *B* band observations at the late phases to obtain an accurate estimate of the decline rate. In the NIR bands the decline rates are very slow until 120 days and show further a flattening (or a slight increase in *K* band) after this epoch.

The time evolution of the *U* − *B*, *B* − *V*, *V* − *R* and *R* − *I* colours of SN 2008S is shown in Fig. 3. All optical colours become progressively redder until about 200 days after the explosion. Subsequently the colours do not show significant evolution. This trend is most evident for the *V* − *I* colour.

The NIR colours show a different evolution after about 200 days after the explosion: *J* − *H* is slightly increasing while *J* − *K* is steepening (Fig. 3).

A “bolometric” light curve (Fig. 3) was obtained by first converting *UBVRIJHK* magnitudes into monochromatic fluxes per unit wavelength, then correcting these fluxes for the adopted extinction ($A_V = 2.13$) according to the Cardelli extinction law (Cardelli et al. 1989), and finally integrating the resulting SED over wavelength, assuming zero flux at the integration limits (the blue end of the *U* band and the red edge of the *K* band). We estimated the flux only for the phases in which *V* band observations were available. The photometric data in the other bands were estimated at these phases by interpolating magnitudes in subsequent nights. The errors do not include uncertainties on extinction correction and distance modulus. During the period 140-290 days, the *UBVRIJHK* “bolometric” light curve tail shows a decay rate of 0.88 ± 0.05 mag/100d, very similar to that of ⁵⁶Co (1.023 mag/100d

Huo & et al. 1987), while the *UBVRI* “bolometric” lightcurve is slightly steeper (1.3 ± 0.05 mag/100d).

3.4 Data at other wavelengths

SN2008S was serendipitously observed with Spitzer on 2008 Feb 6.8 UT during scheduled observations of the nearby SN 2002hh. Images were obtained with IRAC (3.6 μ m, 4.5 μ m, 5.8 μ m and 8.0 μ m) and MIPS (24 μ m). Wesson et al. (2008) discovered strong MIR emission from the SN. The spectral energy distribution (SED) obtained with the Spitzer data was fitted by a 500 K blackbody modified by a dust emissivity that is inversely proportional to the wavelength, giving a luminosity of $21 \times 10^6 L_\odot$.

The Swift satellite also observed SN 2008S in the optical, UV and X-ray bands on Feb. 4.8, 6.0, and 10.5 UT and detected it only in the optical images. SN 2008S was not detected on February 10.62 UT at radio frequencies with the Very Large Array by Chandra & Soderberg (2008). The contribution to the overall energy budget of SN 2008S at about 20 days after the explosion seems to be negligible at UV wavelengths but it is considerable at MIR wavelengths. In Sect. 4.1, we shall demonstrate that the large MIR luminosity must have been caused by an IR echo from pre-existing circumstellar dust.

4 SPECTRAL ENERGY DISTRIBUTION EVOLUTION

4.1 Up to day 120

The SED evolution of SN 2008S is shown in Fig. 4. During the first ~ 120 days, the optical-NIR fluxes can be well reproduced by a single hot blackbody. The blackbody temperatures and radii are shown in Table 8 and plotted in Fig. 5.

The temperature fell monotonically from ~ 8300 K to ~ 5000 K during this time. The radius declined slowly from about 1.9×10^{14} cm to 1.3×10^{14} cm, suggesting that the blackbody surface was defined by the photosphere through which the ejecta flowed. Such behaviour is typical of a supernova at early times. SN 2008S was also serendipitously observed with Spitzer in the MIR on day 17.3 (3.6–8 μ m) and day 18.0 (24 μ m), a uniquely early epoch for coverage of this wavelength region. Remarkably, a strong MIR excess was observed (Wesson et al. 2008). We have re-measured the Spitzer images, using the post-basic calibrated data (PBCD) products provided by the Spitzer pipeline. The 8 μ m and 24 μ m images showed strong irregular background at or near the location of the SN. We therefore subtracted serendipitously obtained pre-explosion “templates” from the post-explosion images before proceeding with our flux measurements. The IRAC templates were taken from Spitzer programme 30292 (Meikle et al.) and the MIPS template from programme 0230 (Barlow et al.). The image matching and subtraction was performed as implemented in the ISIS v2.2 image subtraction package (Alard 2000), and modified in a manner analogous to that described in Meikle et al. (2006). Aperture photometry was performed on the background-subtracted IRAC and MIPS images using the Starlink package GAIA (Draper 2000). A circular aperture of radius 5'' was used for the photometry. This was chosen as a compromise between minimising the effects of the residual irregular background emission at the SN location and minimising the the size of aperture correction needed in the final flux determination. The aperture radius corresponds to a distance of ~ 140 pc at SN 2008S. Residual background in the template-subtracted IRAC

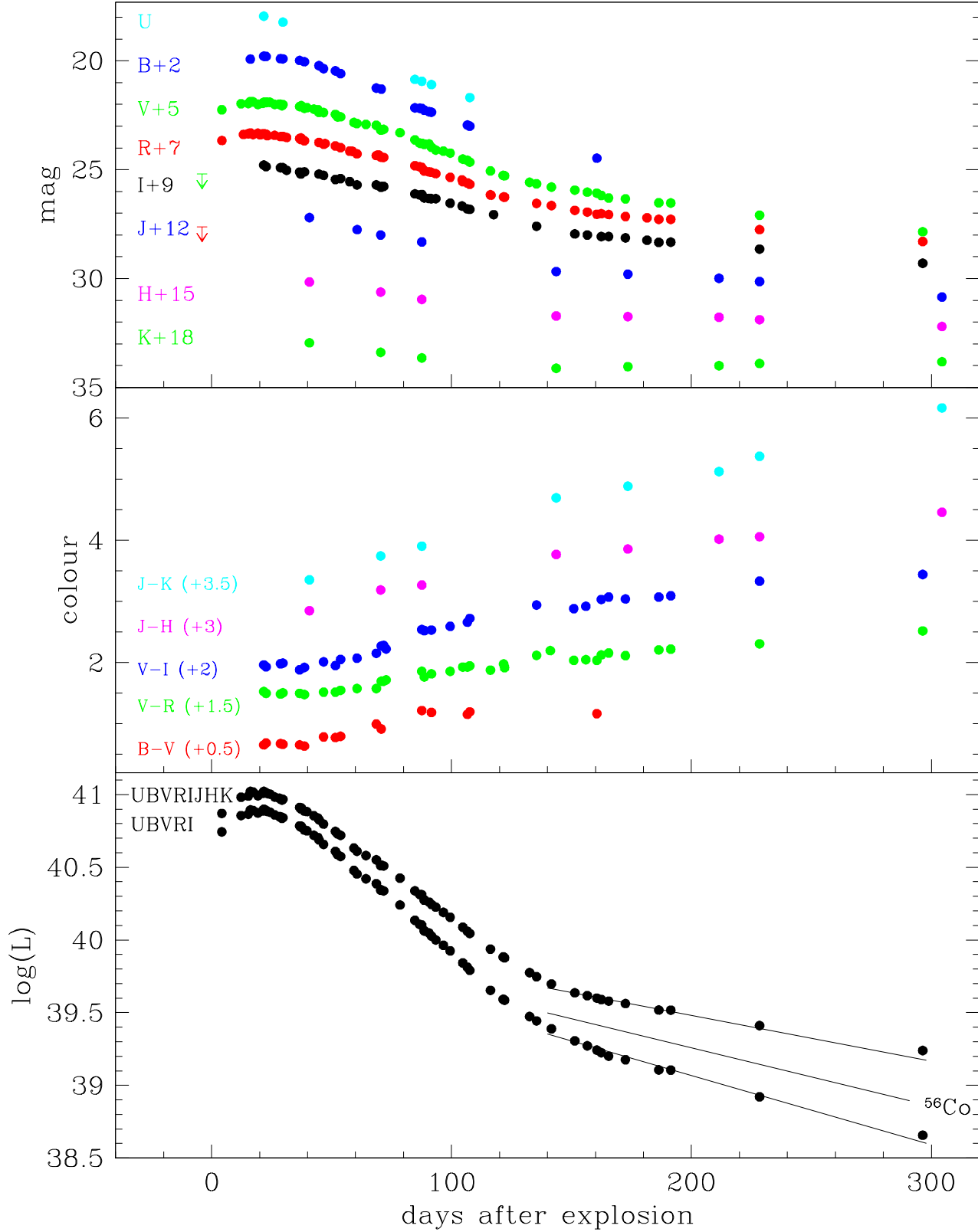


Figure 3. Top panel: $UBVRIJHK$ light curves of SN2008S. Middle panel: evolution of the $U - B$, $B - V$, $V - R$, $V - I$, $J - H$, $J - K$ colours. Bottom panel: $UBVRIJHK$ and $UBVRI$ light curves compared with the ^{56}Co decay model.

Table 8. Parameters for a single blackbody fit (until 90 days after explosion) and for a two-component (hot and warm blackbodies) fit to the *UBVR IJHK* fluxes of SN 2008S.

ph ^a	T _{hot} K	R _{hot} 10 ¹⁴ cm	L _{hot} 10 ⁴⁰ erg s ⁻¹	T _{warm} K	R _{warm} 10 ¹⁴ cm	L _{warm} 10 ⁴⁰ erg s ⁻¹	L _{warm} /L _{tot} per cent
17	8380 ± 150	1.93 ± 0.08	13 ± 0.2				
22	8400 ± 120	1.90 ± 0.08	12 ± 0.1				
39	7600 ± 100	1.89 ± 0.07	8.4 ± 0.1				
71	6300 ± 90	1.77 ± 0.08	3.5 ± 0.4				
108	5220 ± 70	1.50 ± 0.07	1.2 ± 0.1				
122	5000 ± 500	1.30 ± 0.20	0.7 ± 0.3	1400 ± 500	5.0 ± 4.0	0.08 ± 0.1	10
142	4920 ± 160	1.09 ± 0.08	0.5 ± 0.1	1430 ± 200	5.3 ± 0.5	0.11 ± 0.1	25
172	4670 ± 180	0.99 ± 0.10	0.3 ± 0.08	1480 ± 150	6.3 ± 1.0	0.14 ± 0.09	32
228	4430 ± 170	0.85 ± 0.08	0.2 ± 0.05	1413 ± 100	8.4 ± 2.0	0.20 ± 0.1	50
296	4380 ± 160	0.64 ± 0.06	0.1 ± 0.03	1200 ± 60	13 ± 0.2	0.28 ± 0.08	74

^aPhase in days with respect to the explosion date JD 2 454 486 ± 4.

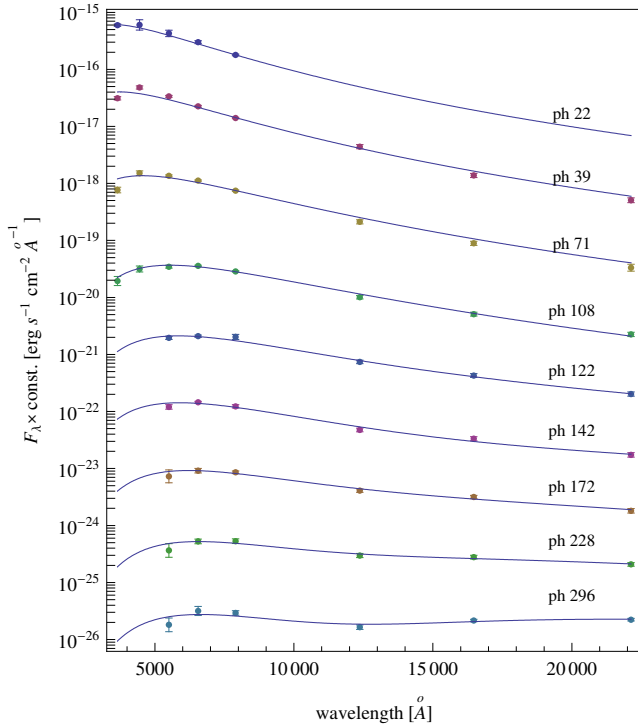


Figure 4. Temporal evolution of the observed SED of SN 2008S. Lines show the blackbody fits to the SED. Phase is in days after the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486).

and MIPS images was measured and subtracted by using a clipped mean sky estimator, and a concentric sky annulus having inner and outer radii of 1.5 and 2 times the aperture radius, respectively. Aperture corrections were derived from the IRAC and MIPS point response function frames available from the Spitzer Science Center, and ranged from $\times 1.04$ at $3.6 \mu\text{m}$ to $\times 2.12$ at $24 \mu\text{m}$. For IRAC, the aperture was centred by centroiding on the SN image. For MIPS, the aperture was centred visually on the SN, checking against the WCS co-ordinates. We found fluxes of 1.60 ± 0.02 mJy at $3.6 \mu\text{m}$, 1.97 ± 0.03 mJy at $4.5 \mu\text{m}$, 3.06 ± 0.07 mJy at $5.8 \mu\text{m}$ and 4.15 ± 0.05 mJy at $8 \mu\text{m}$. The errors are statistical only and do not include calibration uncertainties which may amount to an additional $\sim \pm 5\%$. The image subtraction at $24 \mu\text{m}$ left a substantial residual. We therefore also carried out aperture

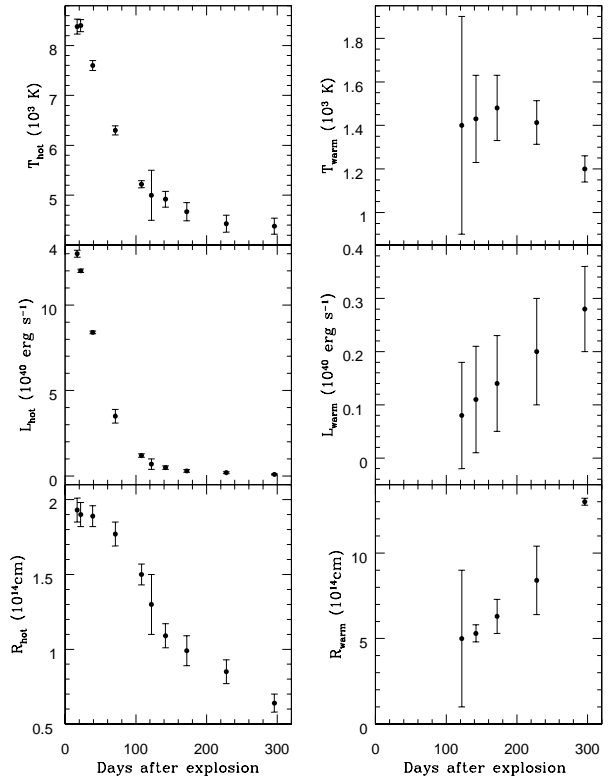


Figure 5. Temporal evolution of the parameters of the hot (left) and warm (right) blackbodies fitting the SED of SN 2008S. Phase is in days after the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486).

photometry on the unsubtracted $24 \mu\text{m}$ image. Consistent results were obtained for the subtraction and non-subtraction procedures. The mean flux derived from the two methods is 0.7 ± 0.1 mJy. Our IRAC and MIPS fluxes are consistent with those reported by Wesson et al. (2008). However, their errors are at least several times larger.

To investigate the nature of the MIR source, we carried out a simultaneous fit of two blackbodies to the SED at 17.3 days, and this is shown in Fig. 6. It can be seen that the blackbodies provide a

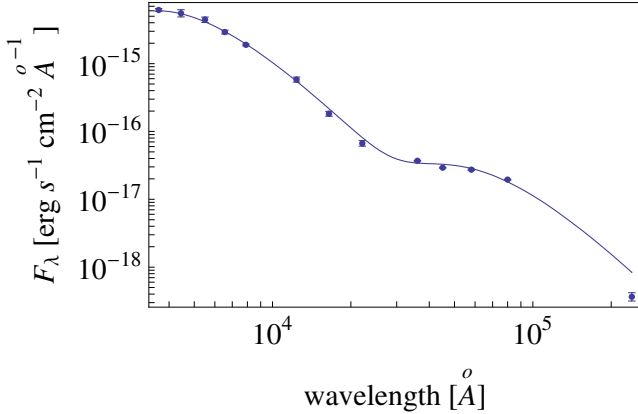


Figure 6. Fit of two blackbodies to the SN 2008S SED from optical to MIR at 17.3 days after explosion. The NIR data are obtained extrapolating data from phase 41.

plausible representation of the data. The hot blackbody has a temperature of 8076 ± 150 K and a radius of $(2.1 \pm 0.1) \times 10^{14}$ cm, corresponding to an expansion velocity of 1430 km s^{-1} . These figures are consistent with emission from the hot photosphere. The warm blackbody has a temperature of 585 ± 5 K. This temperature together with the reasonable match to the blackbody leads us to propose that the MIR emission must be due to warm dust. The radius of the warm blackbody is $(9.9 \pm 0.4) \times 10^{15}$ cm. For the SN to produce a surface of this radius in just 17.3 days would take a velocity of $66,200 \pm 2700 \text{ km s}^{-1}$. Such an enormous velocity immediately rules out newly-formed ejecta dust as the source of the MIR emission. The high velocity also rules out collision of the fastest moving ejecta with a dusty CSM. The only viable alternative appears to be an IR echo from CSM dust. To explore this possibility we have matched an IR echo model to the MIR SED. Details of the model are given in Meikle et al. (2006). This assumes a spherically symmetric cloud of carbon grains centred on the SN, with a concentric dust-free cavity at the centre. For simplicity, a single grain radius, a , is adopted. For ease of computation, we assumed that the grain material was amorphous carbon where, for wavelengths longer than $2\pi/a$, the grain absorptivity/emissivity can be well-approximated as being proportional to $\lambda^{-1.15}$ (Rouleau & Martin 1991). For shorter wavelengths, an absorptivity/emissivity of unity was used. The material density is 1.85 g cm^{-3} (Rouleau & Martin 1991). Free parameters are the grain size, grain number density, the CSM radial density law, the CSM extent and the size of the concentric dust-free cavity. The outer limit of the CSM was set at 10 times that of the cavity radius, although this parameter is not critical. The input luminosity is a parametrized description of the *UBVR IJHK* “bolometric” light curve (Fig. 3). Given the apparently low temperature of the dust, it is reasonable to assume that the IR echo made only a small contribution to the NIR flux implying a negligible overestimate of the bolometric light curve.

It was found that a range of parameters were able plausibly to reproduce the MIR flux. Matches were found for grain radii of $0.001\text{--}0.5 \mu\text{m}$. The corresponding cavity range was 1×10^{17} cm to 3×10^{16} cm and the dust mass range was $10^{-2} - 10^{-3} M_{\odot}$. Such masses of dust are entirely plausible within the CSM of a red (super)giant. For a typical wind velocity of 20 km s^{-1} and a dust-gas mass ratio of 0.01, the CSM dust masses we require in the IR echo model would be produced by a mass loss rate of a few times $10^{-5} M_{\odot} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. All the progenitor circumstellar dust

within a particular radius would have been evaporated in the SN explosion. Given the peak luminosity of the SN, the evaporation radius for carbon grains is 3.5×10^{15} cm. Silicate grains would allow an evaporation cavity several times larger. However, there is little sign of an excess in the $8 \mu\text{m}$ band which we would expect from optically thin silicate grains. Nevertheless, even to account for a cavity radius of 3×10^{16} cm we must invoke some sort of episodic mass-loss history. The echo model spectrum is shown in Fig. 7, left-hand panel. Also shown are the hot blackbody spectrum obtained in the two-blackbody fits described above, and the combined hot blackbody and IR echo spectrum. This is compared with the optical-NIR-MIR observations at this epoch. The earliest NIR data were obtained at 40 days and so the 17.3 days fluxes were estimated by extrapolation of the NIR light curves. The extrapolation was performed by assuming constant $V - J$, $V - H$, $V - K$ colours during the first month. (If, instead, we assume a linear evolution of these colours, then the fluxes in the NIR bands would be smaller by 6%, 22% and 27% in J , H , K respectively.) The hot blackbody was reddened using the extinction law of Cardelli et al. (1989) with $A_V = 2.13$ mag. The total optical depth in the optical region through the CSM in the IR echo model is about 0.20, or $A_V = 0.22$ mag. The reddening effects of the CSM dust are included in the model. Consequently the final IR echo model was reddened with $A_V = 2.13 - 0.22 = 1.91$ mag. Inspection of Fig. 7 shows that a satisfactory match to the data is obtained.

While the echo model easily reproduced the MIR flux, it also produced a certain level of NIR emission, with K being the brightest of the observed NIR bands. This, therefore, provides an additional constraint on the echo model i.e. the model has to be consistent with the NIR flux and its evolution. As explained above, satisfactory fits to the early-time optical-NIR SEDs were obtained using a single blackbody. There was little evidence of a NIR excess up to around 120 days. However, the blackbody fits are subject to error. We therefore investigated whether or not the predicted K band fluxes of the echo model could be consistent with the uncertainties in the observed values and in the hot blackbody fit. For a number of epochs (17.3, 38.7, 71.7, 107.6, 116.2, and 151.4 days) we compared the echo model with the residual K band fluxes derived by subtracting the hot blackbody flux to the observed one. The first five epochs were all consistent with a zero residual, but with uncertainties of $\sim \pm 0.1 \text{ mJy}$. We then selected the echo model which yielded the smallest K band fluxes and still produced a satisfactory match to the MIR fluxes. This was achieved with a $0.5 \mu\text{m}$ grain radius and a dust-free cavity of 30×10^{15} cm. The dust mass is $1.4 \times 10^{-3} M_{\odot}$. The right hand panel of Fig. 7 shows the residual fluxes at $2.2 \mu\text{m}$ together with the $2.2 \mu\text{m}$ light curve from the echo model (coloured blue). The error bars on the residual points were derived as a combination of the uncertainty in the observed/extrapolated points and the uncertainties in the hot blackbody fits. It can be seen that the model flux never exceeds the residual by much more than 1σ . The marginal negative shift of the first three residual points may be due to slightly imperfect blackbody fits such as might be caused by the actual extinction law being different from the one adopted. We deduce that it is quite plausible that the K -band flux from an IR echo would have been undetected, hence accounting for the near-zero residuals. The later three residual points show the gradual emergence of the NIR excess, discussed below. We conclude that the IR echo model accounts for the MIR flux as well as being consistent with all the shorter wavelength fluxes.

Also shown in Fig. 7 (right hand panel) is the $8 \mu\text{m}$ light curve predicted by the IR echo model. We note that neither the $2.2 \mu\text{m}$ nor $8 \mu\text{m}$ light curves exhibit the flat top or plateau characteristic of the

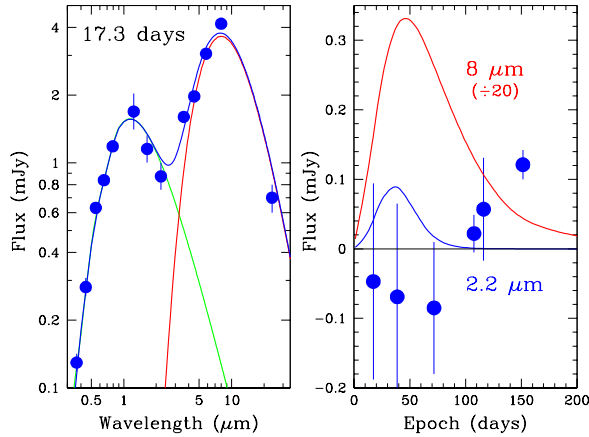


Figure 7. The left hand panel shows the day 17.3 hot blackbody spectrum (green), the IR echo spectrum (red) and the combined spectrum (blue). These are compared with the day 17.3 optical-NIR points and the day 17.3 MIR points. The hot blackbody has a temperature of 8076 ± 150 K and a radius of $(2.1 \pm 0.1) \times 10^{14}$ cm, reddened using the extinction law of Cardelli et al. (1989) with $A_V = 2.13$ mag. The total optical depth through the CSM in the optical region is about 0.20, or $A_V = 0.22$ mag. The reddening effects of the CSM dust are included in the model. Consequently the final IR echo model was reddened with $A_V = 2.13 - 0.22 = 1.91$ mag. For the IR echo model, a single grain size was used with radius $a = 0.5 \mu\text{m}$. The grain material is amorphous carbon where, for wavelengths longer than $2\pi/a$, the grain absorptivity/emissivity is proportional to $\lambda^{-1.15}$ (Rouleau & Martin 1991). For shorter wavelengths, an absorptivity/emissivity of unity was used. The material density is 1.85 g cm^{-3} (Rouleau & Martin 1991). The CSM extended from 3×10^{16} cm to 3×10^{17} cm, with the dust density declining as r^{-2} (steady wind). The dust mass is $1.4 \times 10^{-3} M_\odot$. The right hand panel shows the residual fluxes at $2.2 \mu\text{m}$ (blue points) at a number of epochs together with the $2.2 \mu\text{m}$ light curve from the IR echo model (blue). For the first five points it can be seen that the model flux never exceeds the residual by much more than 1σ . The latest three residual points show the gradual emergence of the NIR excess (see text). Also shown is the IR echo light curve at $8 \mu\text{m}$ (red).

IR echo phenomenon. This is because, owing to the exceptionally low bolometric luminosity of SN 2008S, the radius of the dust free cavity had to be small in order to attain a sufficiently high dust temperature. Indeed, the radius of the cavity in the model illustrated here is only 12 light days (3×10^{16} cm). Consequently the decline of the light curves are actually dominated by the characteristic decline timescale of the input bolometric light curve, which is about 70 days per e-fold, together with the r^{-2} dust density decline.

The final MIR observation of SN 2008S was at about 180 days, but at the time of writing, the data are not yet out of embargo (due 2009 August). Nevertheless, we can use the IR echo model to predict the fluxes at this epoch. We find that the $8 \mu\text{m}$ flux at 180 days is 1.3 mJy for the model discussed above, rising to around 5 mJy for models having a grain radius $\sim 0.01 \mu\text{m}$. Thus, the observed 180 day MIR fluxes should provide constraints for the grain size.

4.2 After day 120: dust formation?

To fit the SED at later epochs we need the sum of a hot and a warm blackbody. We find statistical evidence for the emergence of a warm component as early as 120 days, viz. $\Delta\text{BIC} = \text{BIC}_{\text{hot}} - \text{BIC}_{\text{hot+warm}} \simeq 1.5$. This becomes stronger with time, reaching $\Delta\text{BIC} \simeq 5.7$ by 135 days. The hot component was still dominant at 172 days but by 296 days it contributed only 26% of the total luminosity. The temperature of the warm component stayed roughly constant at 1400–1500 K until at least 228 days, and but by 296 days had cooled to 1200 K. The luminosity and the radius monotonically increased during the 122–296 days period (Fig. 5).

A clear NIR excess was also observed by ~ 120 days in several other SNe (1997ab, 1979C, 1980K, 1982E, 1982L, 1982R, 1985L, 1993J, 1994Y, 1995N, 1998S, 2005ip, 2006jc) (e.g. Gerardy et al. 2002). The simplest explanation for the IR excess in both SN 2008S and these other SNe is thermal emission from warm dust heated by the supernova. However, different locations, origins and heating mechanisms are possible. Specifically, IR excesses may be due to (a) newly-formed dust in the ejecta, heated by radioactive decay or a reverse shock, (b) newly-formed dust in a cool dense shell (CDS) formed by the SN shock/CSM collision and heated directly by the shock, by absorption of X-rays from the interaction region or by the BLC of the SN (a type of IR echo), (c) ejecta collision with pre-existing circumstellar dust or (d) an IR echo from pre-existing circumstellar dust heated by the SN BLC. These scenarios do not necessarily exclude one another. For example, in the case of SN 2006jc the NIR excess was explained by Mattila et al. (2008) as a combination of IR echoes from newly-formed CDS dust and from pre-existing dust in the CSM.

In the case of SN 2008S, we can immediately rule out an IR echo, whether from CDS or CSM dust, as being the cause of the late-time NIR excess. The BLC is too weak by a factor of ~ 100 to account for the high dust temperatures and luminosities seen during the 200–300 day period. Moreover, for an IR echo scenario we would expect the phase and rise-time of the echo flux to be determined by the temporal behaviour of the BLC, which is about 35 days per e-fold beginning at 0 days (cf. Fig. 7 RH panel). Yet the NIR excess does not appear until at least 120 days and has a characteristic risetime of about 100 days.

This leaves dust heated by radioactivity or by energy from shock interaction with circumstellar material. We first estimated the mass of such dust required to reproduce the NIR flux. We employed the escape probability model described in Meikle et al. (2007). Setting the expansion velocity of the dust cloud at $1000 \pm 50 \text{ km s}^{-1}$, we found that for silicate dust grains in the ejecta the NIR excess was reproduced with a dust mass rising monotonically from about $0.2 \times 10^{-5} M_\odot$ on day 122 to $1.2 \times 10^{-5} M_\odot$ on day 296. During this time, the dust temperature fell from about 1300 K to 1100 K and the optical depth to the centre at $2.2 \mu\text{m}$ rose from 0.2 to 0.4. Thus, optically thin dust lying well within the velocity limit of refractory elements (say up to $\sim 2000 \text{ km s}^{-1}$) was able to reproduce the NIR excess. It follows that the derived masses indicate the minimum dust mass required. Reducing the size of the dust cloud caused it to quickly become optically thick, with the blackbody limit being approached at a radius corresponding to about 500 km s^{-1} . Clearly, in this optically thick case the NIR observations do not restrict the mass of dust that could be concealed in the ejecta. If instead of ejecta dust, we assume the dust lay in the cloud which gave rise to the early time MIR echo, and was heated by ejecta collision, then the mass of dust required to reproduce the NIR flux remains much the same, but the optical depth

falls to around 0.001. Finally, for optically thin dust, replacing silicate grains with amorphous carbon grains reduces the derived dust mass by a factor of about 10, due to the higher emissivity of carbon in the NIR region.

We conclude that a very modest mass of optically thin dust can account for the NIR excess flux. Moreover, it appears that the dust mass involved grew quite rapidly between 122 and 296 days. This dust may have condensed in the ejecta, heated by radioactive decay or a reverse shock. Alternatively, its location may have been much farther out in the CSM. To account for the early-time MIR flux we had to invoke a “dust-free cavity” of radius at least 3×10^{16} cm, with a dust mass beyond this limit of at least $10^{-3} M_{\odot}$. However, to account for the later NIR excess flux, we have shown that the required dust mass would be barely 1% of this. Thus, it is quite feasible that sufficient dust to account for the NIR flux lay within the MIR echo cavity, with an inner limit fixed only by a dust evaporation radius which could be as small as $\sim 3 \times 10^{15}$ cm (see above). For the ejecta to reach this distance in, say, 150 days, would take a velocity of just 2300 km s^{-1} . The apparently increasing mass of dust might have been due to dust newly forming within a CDS. Alternatively, it simply may be that the shock swept up an increasing mass of pre-existing CSM dust.

Is it plausible that the NIR excess was due to new, radioactively-heated ejecta dust? We have already shown that this can be achieved with a small mass of optically-thin dust lying comfortably within the limits of refractory elements. However, examination of the energy budget reveals problems. In subsection 7.4 we estimate that SN 2008S produced only about $\times 0.02$ of the mass of ^{56}Ni that was released by SN 1987A. If we scale the radioactive energy deposition law for SN 1987A (Li et al. 1993) to SN 2008S we find that the deposited radioactive energy exceeded that of the dust luminosity by $\times 8$ on day 122 falling to $\times 1.25$ by day 228 i.e. there was sufficient radioactive energy to power the dust luminosity up to about day 228. However, by day 296, even if we assume the entire radioactive luminosity was deposited in the ejecta, it could only supply half of the dust luminosity i.e. for radioactivity to account for the warm component flux at 296 days we would have to double the derived mass of ^{56}Ni . Another possible difficulty is that, even if we focus on just the period 122-228 days, the fraction of radioactive energy deposited in the dust increases from $12 \sim \%$ to $80 \sim \%$ and yet the average number density of ejecta dust stayed approximately constant. Why then did the dust-deposition fraction show such a large increase? It may be related to the detailed distribution of the grain growth and radioactive material. But, given the day 296 energy deficit, perhaps a more plausible explanation is that at least part of the NIR excess had another cause. This might be reverse-shock heating of new ejecta dust. Alternatively it might be IR radiation from shock-heated newly-formed CDS dust or pre-existing circumstellar grains. We conclude that, while the earlier NIR excess could have been entirely due to new, radioactively-heated dust in the ejecta, as time went by, an increasing proportion of the flux must have been powered by other mechanisms.

NIR/MIR-based evidence for newly-formed dust in the ejecta or CDS of SNe has been reported in the cases of SN 1987A (Moseley et al. 1989; Whitelock et al. 1989; Suntzeff & Bouchet 1990; Meikle et al. 1993; Roche et al. 1993), SN 1998S (Pozzo et al. 2004), SN 2004gd (Sugerman et al. 2006; Meikle et al. 2007), SN 2004et (Kotak et al. in prep.) and SN 2006jc (Smith et al. 2008; Di Carlo et al. 2008; Mattila et al. 2008). Dust masses of typically 10^{-4} – $10^{-3} M_{\odot}$ are directly observed, although larger masses may exist in optically thick clumps. Dust condensation in the ejecta or in a CDS can be also be demon-

strated via the effects of the dust on optical radiation. In particular, it can attenuate the red wings of spectral lines, causing an apparent blue shift of the line profiles (Lucy et al. 1991; Danziger et al. 1991), 1998S (Pozzo et al. 2004) and 1999em (Elmhamdi et al. 2003). However, the spectra of SN 2008S are of insufficient resolution or wavelength precision to enable us to make this test.

5 SPECTROSCOPIC DATA REDUCTION AND ANALYSIS

We spectroscopically monitored SN 2008S for eight months with several telescopes and details of the spectroscopic observations are reported in Table 9.

Spectra were reduced (trimmed, overscan and bias corrected, flat-fielded) using standard routines within IRAF. An optimal variance weighted extraction of the spectra was carried out using the IRAF routine APALL. Wavelength calibration was performed using the spectra of comparison lamps acquired with the same instrumental configuration as the SN observation. Flux calibration was done using spectrophotometric standard stars observed with the same instrumental set-up. Approximate spectral resolutions were estimated from the full-width-at-half-maximum (FWHM) of the night sky lines. The wavelength calibration is accurate to $\pm 1 \text{ \AA}$ for ISIS spectra, $\pm 2 \text{ \AA}$ for DOLORES and DBSP spectra and $\pm 3 \text{ \AA}$ for CAFOS, ALFOSC and AFOSC. spectra. Atmospheric extinction corrections were applied using tabulated extinction coefficients for each telescope site. The spectra of standard stars have also been used to identify telluric features and to remove these from the SN spectra. Spectra of similar quality obtained during the same night were combined to increase the signal to noise ratio (S/N) ratio.

To check the flux calibration, BVR magnitudes were estimated by integrating the spectra convolved with standard filter functions using the task CALCPHOT within the IRAF package STSDAS. The spectro-photometric magnitudes were compared to the photometric observations and, whenever necessary, a scale factor was applied to match the photometric observations. The flux calibration is accurate to within approximately 10%.

5.1 Line identification

We identified $\text{H}\alpha$, $\text{H}\beta$, $\text{H}\delta$, $[\text{Ca II}]$ doublet ($\lambda\lambda 7292, 7324$) and Ca II triplet ($\lambda\lambda 8498, 8542, 8662$), Fe II (multiplets 27, 28, 37, 38, 40, 42, 46, 48, 49, 72, 73, 74, 92, 186, 199), $[\text{O I}]$ and Mn II (multiplet 4) in emission and Na I doublet ($\lambda\lambda 5890, 5896$) and O I triplet ($\lambda\lambda 7772, 7774, 7775$) in absorption in early spectra (Fig. 8 and Table A2). In the more recent spectra O I (multiplet 4 $\lambda 8446$) and Na I D are visible in emission, while the O I triplet in absorption seems to disappear. These emission lines are likely produced in different regions with different ionization states and velocities. The low ionization is likely due to high column density material with high optical depth. Some lines show a multicomponent profile ($\text{H}\alpha$, $\text{H}\beta$, Ca II triplet), others only a narrow component ($[\text{Ca II}]$ doublet or Fe II lines) with a peculiar asymmetric profile due to an enhanced red wing (Fig. 9 and Fig. 14).

5.2 Spectroscopic evolution

The spectra of SN 2008S do not show significant evolution during the temporal interval from 15 days to eight months after the explosion (Fig. 10), the continuum becoming progressively redder and

Table 9. Journal of spectroscopic observations of SN 2008S.

JD ^a	ph ^b	Telescope	Grism or Grating	Range Å	Resolution (FWHM) Å	exp. time s
500.8	15	WHT	R1200R	6200–6880	0.7	1800
501.3	16	NOT	Gr 4	3600–8700	19	800
504.3	19	WHT	R158R	5500–10000	10	800
507.7	22	TNGD	LR-R	5150–10225	11	1800
513.7	28	CAO	Gr 4	3900–7800	24	3600
514.8	29	WHT	R1200R	7025–7560	0.8	900
514.8	29	WHT	R300B	3170–5350	3.5	900
523.7	38	CAHAT	G-200	4950–10260	13	2700
529.8	44	INT	R300V	3750–9340	5	1000
532.7	47	CAHAT	G-200	4950–9750	14	3000
539.8	54	TNGD	VHR-V	4650–6600	5	2400
552.8	67	CAO	Gr 4	3790–7790	24	3600
553.7	68	CAHAT	r-100	5800–9600	9	3600
557.8	72	CAO	Gr 4	3500–8450	24	3600
561.7	76	TNGD	VHR-R	7110–7560	4.1	2700
582.6	97	CAHAT	r-200	6178–10600	11	3600
588.7	103	CAHAT	b-200	3900–8850	11	1700
606.7	121	WHT	R316	5520–8260	6	2700
609.7	124	WHT	R316	7190–10400	4.7	1800
667.7	182	WHT	R158	5400–9900	10	2700
668.7	183	WHT	R158	5400–10200	6	2700
741.7	256	HP200	300	3300–5600	8	1800
741.7	256	HP200	158	5800–10300	11	1800

^aJD – 2454 000.00^b Phase in days with respect to the explosion date JD 2 454 486 ± 4.

WHT = the 4.2 m William Herschel Telescope (WHT) with the Intermediate Dispersion Spectrograph and Imaging System (ISIS); NOT= the NOT with ALFOSC; TNGD = the TNG with DOLORES; CAO = the Copernico telescope with AFOSC; CAHAT= the 2.2 m telescope at CAHA with CAFOS; INT= the 2.5 m Isaac Newton Telescope (INT) with the Intermediate Dispersion Spectrograph (IDS); HP200= the 5.08 m Hale Telescope with the Double Spectrograph Specs (DBSP) at Palomar Observatory.

fainter with time. All spectra consist of a nearly featureless continuum with superimposed strong Balmer emission lines, [Ca II] doublet and Ca II near-infrared triplet. The most remarkable change in the latest spectra is the presence of Na I D and O I (λ 8446) in emission.

We focused our analysis on H α , the [Ca II] doublet and the Ca II triplet since they are the most prominent lines and visible in all spectra estimating line parameters with the IRAF task *split*. The velocities are FWHM and those of H α and Ca II λ 8662 have been measured by deblending the multiple-component profile and assuming a Gaussian profile for each component. To measure the peak position at different phases we selected the spectra acquired with a slit width smaller than the seeing, hence considering only spectra with accurate wavelength calibrations.

5.2.1 Hydrogen

The intensity of H α decreases by a factor of approximately ten from the earliest spectrum to the latest. Its luminosity follows the luminosity in *R* band (see Fig. 11) during the first 60 days after the explosion, then shows a flattening (the *R* band light curve changes the decline slope shortly after). The H α profile in the first high resolution ISIS spectrum exhibits three different kinetic components as shown in Fig. 9. The narrow, intermediate and broad components correspond to velocity widths (FWHM) of $v_n \sim 250 \text{ km s}^{-1}$, $v_i \sim 1000 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ and $v_b \sim 3000 \text{ km s}^{-1}$, respectively, in this early spectrum.

The H α intensity and the broad component velocity width,

v_b , show a similar temporal behaviour, decreasing quickly until about 60 days after explosion and more slowly after this epoch (Fig. 11 and Table 10). The intermediate component velocity width, v_i , shows a less abrupt decline. The narrow component, v_n , is not resolved in several spectra at intermediate phases but appears to stay constant until 60 days after the explosion and is not visible after this epoch (Fig. 11 and Table 10). In the first spectrum H β shows a multicomponent profile similar to H α , but in the subsequent spectra this feature is too weak for such analysis. The H α profile could be interpreted as broad underlying emission due to the ejecta, an intermediate component resulting by shocked material behind the interaction front between ejecta and CSM and a narrow component from unshocked CSM. However, the lack of any high velocity absorption component, or P-Cygni profile, is a fairly strong argument that the broad emission is not a direct measurement of the ejecta velocities.

The line profile may be also interpreted as a narrow core with broad wings resulting from multiple scattering events with thermal electrons. This was suggested by Chugai (2001) as an explanation for the very broad wings of H α in SN 1998S. However, the situation is far from similar for SN 2008S (Sect. 7.4 and Fig. 23). The narrow component of H α seems to be asymmetric, but the resolution of our spectra is not adequate to analyse its profile in detail.

The redshift in the H α peak decreases after about 100 days (Fig. 13), although the uncertainties in the wavelength calibration mean that this shift has only a modest significance. The EW(H α) increases with time, becoming very large at late phases (about 900Å). There are two processes proposed for the origin of H emis-

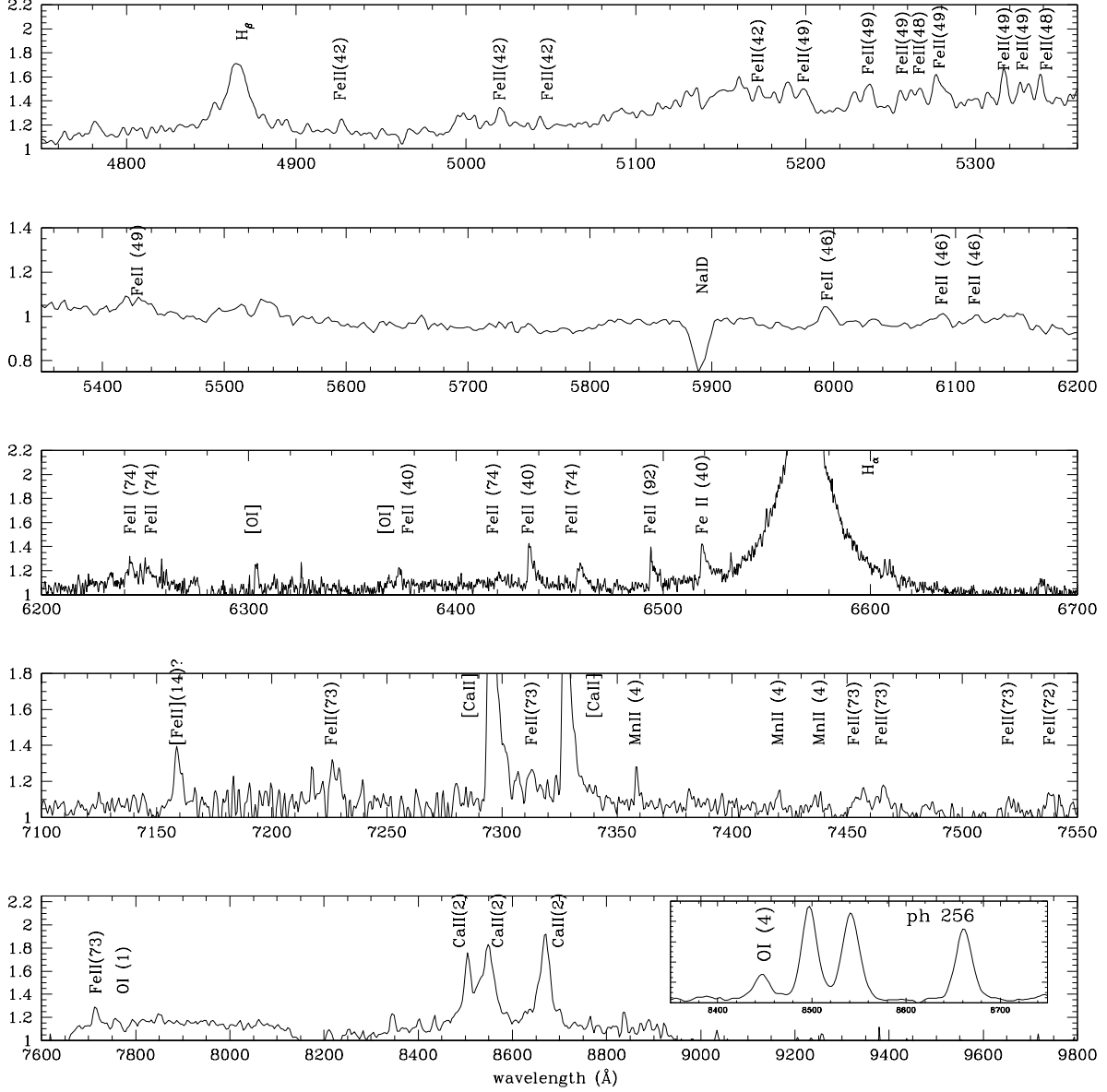


Figure 8. Spectral lines observed in SN 2008S spectra. From the top to the bottom panel: spectra obtained at WHT (phase 29), at TNG (phase 22), at WHT (phase 15), at WHT (phase 29), at WHT (phase 19). Inset: spectrum obtained with HP200 (phase 256). Phase is in days after the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486) and wavelength is in the observer frame.

sion lines: photoionisation with subsequent emission by recombination or collisional excitation (Drake & Ulrich 1980). The first can not explain the increase of the $\text{EW}(\text{H}\alpha)$ with time so collisional excitation of $\text{H}\alpha$ from the $n = 2$ level seems to be the more likely mechanism to explain Balmer emission, especially at the latest phases.

The Balmer line strengths can be compared in a similar manner to that performed by Berger et al. (2009) for NGC 300 OT2008-1. The $\text{H}\alpha/\text{H}\beta$ ratio is larger than the recombination value of about 3 and increased from 4 at 15 days to 10 at 256 days after the explosion. This ratio depends critically on several parameters: electron

density (N_e), electron temperature, external radiation field strength and optical depth in $\tau_{\text{H}\alpha}$ (Drake & Ulrich 1980). The three most important processes which can change the line intensity with respect to the recombination value are: Balmer self absorption (important at low density), collisional excitation and de-excitation (important at high density) (Drake & Ulrich 1980). Collisional excitation processes also cause the $\text{H}\alpha/\text{H}\beta$ intensity ratio to increase, but the N_e value at which these processes become important inversely depends on $\tau_{\text{H}\alpha}$. At the first epochs the $\text{H}\alpha/\text{H}\beta$ intensity ratio indicates of $10^{10} \text{ cm}^{-3} \leq N_e \leq 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ given the observed temperatures in SN 2008S (see Sect. 4) so the collisional processes

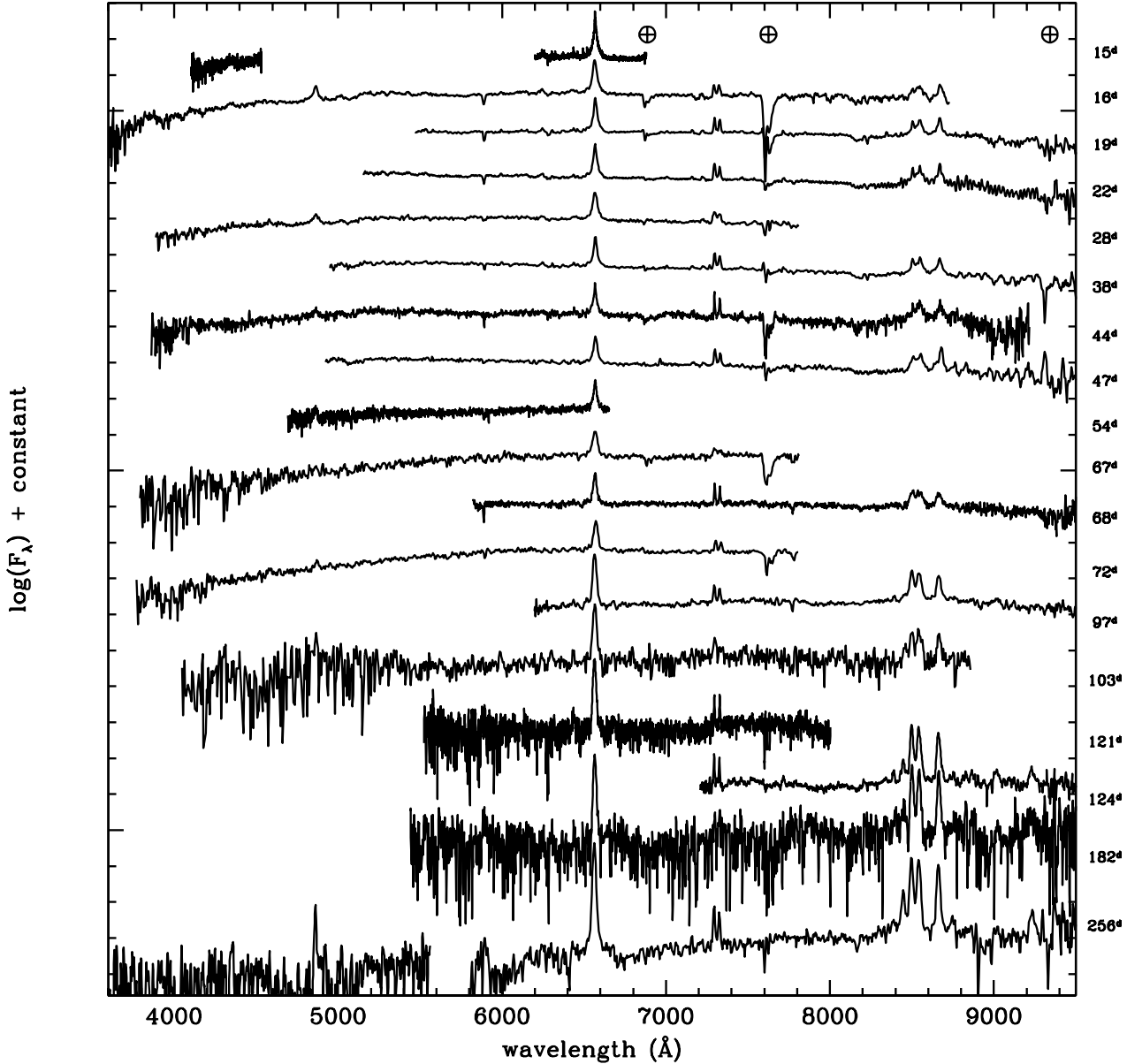


Figure 10. Time sequence of SN 2008S spectra. The spectra are corrected for Galactic extinction. The phase reported to the right of each spectrum is relative to the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486) and wavelength is in the observer frame. The \oplus symbols mark the positions of the most important telluric absorptions.

may have an important role. The Balmer decrement, observed in SN 2008S, may be a sign of the high optical depth and the interaction with a high density CSM. In particular, its evolution is likely led by the increase of $\tau_{H\alpha}$ with time.

5.2.2 Calcium

The strength of the [Ca II] doublet decreases by a factor of ~ 10 over 100 days and line ratio $H\alpha/[Ca II]$ ranges from 9 to 18 over about 260 days (Table 11). We did not see any temporal evolution of the intensity ratio for the [Ca II] doublet (always around the

value of 1 ± 0.2) and of the position of the peak. The [Ca II] doublet shows a velocity width (FWHM) of about $250 \pm 60 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ that is comparable to that of the narrow component of both $H\alpha$ and Ca II triplet. This velocity width remains constant while the line profile shows an evolution: it is asymmetric during the first three months after the explosion and starts to be more symmetric after this epoch (Fig. 14).

The [Ca II] doublet very likely originates in a lower density region with respect to the Ca IR triplet. As discussed by Chevalier & Fransson (1994), the [Ca II] doublet originates from radiative de-excitation from the metastable $3d^2D$ level, which is

Table 10. H α and Ca II ($\lambda 8662$) velocities of the three components: broad (v_b), intermediate (v_i) and narrow (v_n). The velocity widths (FWHM) are in km s^{-1} .

JD ^a	ph ^b	v_b (H α)	v_i (H α)	v_n (H α)	v_b (Ca II $\lambda 8662$)	v_i (Ca II $\lambda 8662$)	v_n (Ca II $\lambda 8662$)
501	15	3110 ± 300	900 ± 90	220 ± 30			
504	19	3020 ± 300	875 ± 90		3000 ± 350	850 ± 90	264 ± 30
508	22	2910 ± 350	870 ± 85				
514	28	2620 ± 370	850 ± 90				
524	38				2280 ± 300	753 ± 60	
530	44	2460 ± 250	844 ± 90	240 ± 30			
540	54	1940 ± 200	790 ± 90	260 ± 40			
554	68	1950 ± 250	770 ± 95	245 ± 30			
583	97	1920 ± 200	750 ± 80		2040 ± 200	720 ± 80	
589	103	1610 ± 180	680 ± 75				
607	121	1450 ± 100	670 ± 90				
610	124				1340 ± 200	660 ± 70	
669	183	1300 ± 90	560 ± 70		1290 ± 200	550 ± 70	
742	256	1270 ± 100	480 ± 70		1260 ± 300	540 ± 80	

^aJD = 2 454 000.00^bPhase in days with respect to the explosion date JD 2 454 486 \pm 4.**Table 11.** Evolution of the intensity of H α , Ca II ($\lambda 8662$) and [Ca II] doublet. Intensities are in units of $10^{-14} \text{ erg cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$.

JD ^a	ph ^b	I (H α)	I (Ca II $\lambda 8662$)	I ([Ca II] $\lambda 7291$)	I ([Ca II] $\lambda 7323$)
501	15	3.7 ± 0.20	1.40 ± 0.08	0.42 ± 0.02	0.41 ± 0.02
505	19	3.5 ± 0.20	1.26 ± 0.07		
508	22	3.2 ± 0.15	1.18 ± 0.07		
514	28	2.7 ± 0.15			
524	38	2.1 ± 0.12	0.86 ± 0.06	0.37 ± 0.01	0.35 ± 0.01
530	44	1.6 ± 0.12			
540	54	1.3 ± 0.10			
554	68	1.2 ± 0.10			
562	76			0.17 ± 0.009	0.15 ± 0.009
583	97	1.1 ± 0.10	0.45 ± 0.05	0.12 ± 0.008	0.10 ± 0.009
589	103	0.98 ± 0.09			
607	121	0.65 ± 0.07	0.37 ± 0.04	0.051 ± 0.003	0.053 ± 0.004
742	256	0.39 ± 0.05	0.22 ± 0.03	0.022 ± 0.001	0.021 ± 0.001

^aJD = 2 454 000.00^bPhase in days with respect to the explosion date JD 2 454 486 \pm 4.

highly populated. The probabilities for the two [Ca II] transitions originating within the same multiplet are approximately equal and the threshold to ionize Ca^+ to Ca^{++} from this metastable level is at 1218.8 Å. The gap between this threshold and the Ly α line is 3.2 Å corresponding to about 800 km s^{-1} . Only gas with higher velocity can ionize Ca II by absorbing Ly α photons and suppress [Ca II] emission. The presence of strong [Ca II] doublet in the first SN 2008S spectra may be indicative of little Ca II being ionized, and hence a narrow Ly α line.

The Ca II NIR triplet must originate in a different region from that which produces the [Ca II] doublet since it shows both a multicomponent profile (Fig. 15) and a decreasing redshift with time (Fig. 13). Velocities for the different components are reported in Table 10 and are consistent with those of H α . The intensity ratios of the infrared triplet to H α and to [Ca II] increase with the time (Table 11) while the three Ca II NIR lines are always observed to be equal in strength.

To investigate if the peak position of H α , the [Ca II] doublet and the Ca II NIR triplet show any temporal evolution, we again exploited the BIC factor. We compare the BIC values obtained by

fitting the spectral time series with either a position constant in time or a temporal evolution (parameterized as a straight line with a non null slope), $\Delta\text{BIC} = \text{BIC}_{\text{slope}} - \text{BIC}_{\text{const}}$. For H α there is only a marginal evidence for an evolution, $\Delta\text{BIC} \simeq 0.3$. For the Ca II doublet, evolution is not favored ($\Delta\text{BIC} \simeq -1.0$ and -0.8 for the first and the second line, respectively). Finally, there is strong evidence for a decreasing redshift for the Ca II NIR triplet, $\Delta\text{BIC} \simeq 13.9$.

5.2.3 Oxygen, Iron and Sodium

The [O I] ($\lambda\lambda 6300, 6364$) doublet is visible in the first high resolution spectrum with a very low velocity width (FWHM), about 80 km s^{-1} . These are collisionally suppressed at high density so likely originate in a slow moving and low density region. The O I triplet ($\lambda\lambda 7772-7774-7775$) has a velocity width of about 300 km s^{-1} in the first spectra and seems to disappear in the last. O I ($\lambda 8446$) appears at the latest phases with a velocity width of about 530 km s^{-1} similar to those of the H α and Ca II intermediate com-

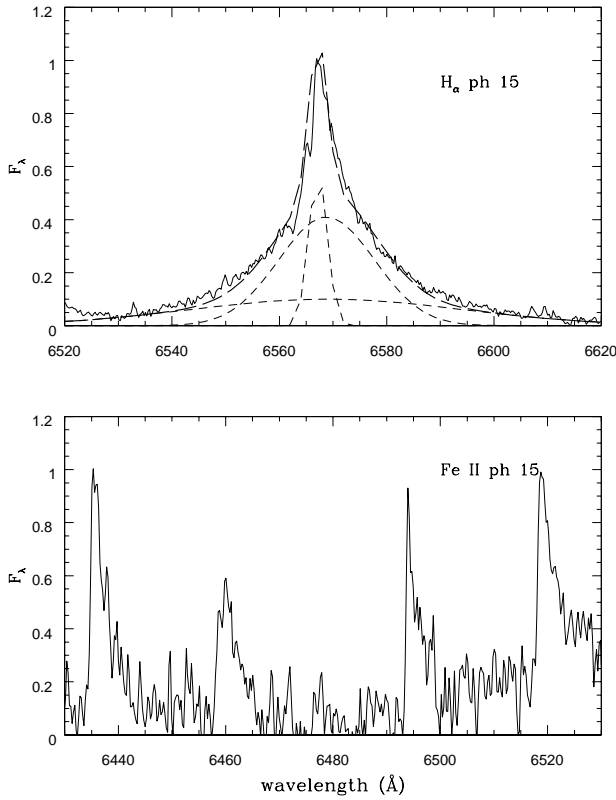


Figure 9. Line profiles in the high resolution ISIS spectrum acquired two weeks after the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486): in the top panel the multi-component profile of $H\alpha$ (the three Gaussian component are shown as thin dotted lines and their combination is shown as thick dotted line), in the bottom panel the profiles of Fe II lines. Wavelength is in the observer frame. The flux densities have been normalised to the line peaks.

ponents at the same phase. The Fe II lines, visible in the first high resolution spectrum, appear to have only a narrow component with velocity width around 200 km s^{-1} and the same profile as [Ca II]. The Na I D feature is visible in absorption in the early spectra. There are likely two blended lines in the high resolution spectrum obtained with INT: the Galactic contribution and the host galaxy doublet. In the spectra acquired at 182 and 256 days after explosion this feature clearly appears in emission. This evolution is indicative of the circumstellar origin of the Na I D and is a clear sign of the high density of CSM. The evolution of $\text{EW}(\text{Na I D})$, illustrated in Sect. 2.3, is due to an evolution of the ionization conditions in the CSM and in the ejecta of SN 2008S since the EW is related to the ionization stage of Na I.

6 THE PROGENITOR OF SN2008S

6.1 Optical and NIR pre explosion images

We carried out an independent analysis on the deepest pre-explosion optical and NIR images that we could locate, similar to that presented in Prieto et al. (2008). We added some further data and recalculated all the limits as some values in that paper were taken from heterogeneous references rather than original data. We used optical images from the Gemini North and Large Binocular

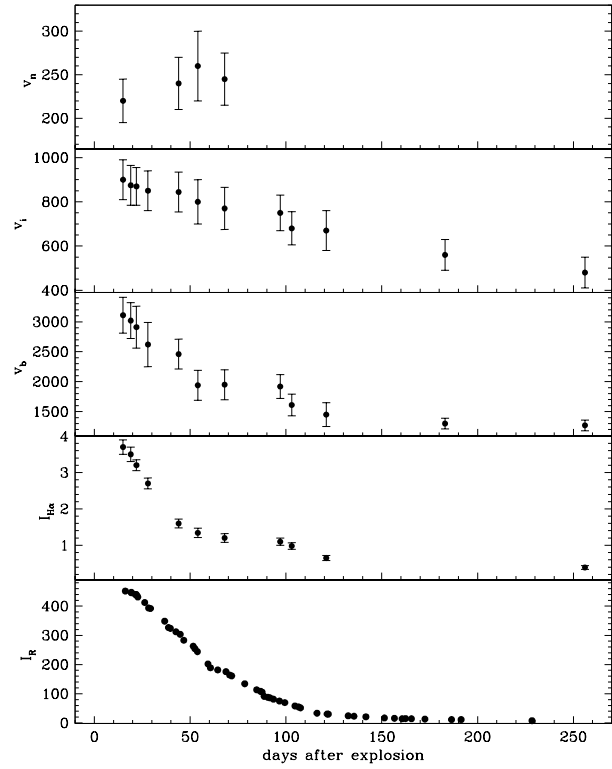


Figure 11. Temporal evolution of $H\alpha$ kinematic components and intensity. From the top to the bottom panel: evolution of the velocity of the narrow (v_n), intermediate (v_i), broad (v_b) component, the integrated flux of $H\alpha$ and the R band. Velocity widths (FWHM) are in km s^{-1} and integrated fluxes are in units of $10^{-14} \text{ erg cm}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$.

Telescope and NIR images from the Bok 2.3 m telescope. To ensure an accurate positioning of SN2008S on all the pre-explosion images we used an image of SN2008S obtained with the Auxiliary Port Imager (AUX) on the WHT on 2008 February 08. The camera has a pixel scale of $0''.11/\text{pixel}$, and a 1024 pixel TEK2 CCD. A single R band image of 300s was taken, and although it was at high airmass (2.47) the image quality was $1''.03$. The position of SN2008S was determined on all the pre-explosion images to an accuracy of $0''.1$ and we confirm the results of Prieto et al. (2008) that there is no optical or NIR counterpart detected. We calculated the 3σ detection limits for each of the optical images from the LBT and Gemini images and these are reported in Table 12.

The K' band image is from Knapen et al. (2003) which was taken with the Bok 2.3 m. telescope of the Steward Observatory on 1999 October 17 with the PISCES camera, a HAWAII HgCdTe array of 1024×1024 pixels of $0''.5$ on the sky. The dithered exposures resulted in co-added total exposure time of between 1000-2000 seconds, depending on field location, and the image quality was $2''.3$. The WHT Auxiliary Port R band image was used to locate the position of SN 2008S on the frame by matching the positions of 12 stars located within $1.7'$ of the SN in both R and K images. The geometric transformation resulted in an RMS to the fit of 108 milli-arcseconds and at this transformed position there is no detection of a source in the K' band image. The zero-point for this frame was estimated using five 2MASS stars located close to the SN and the calculated 3σ limiting magnitude was estimated to be $K = 18.0$.

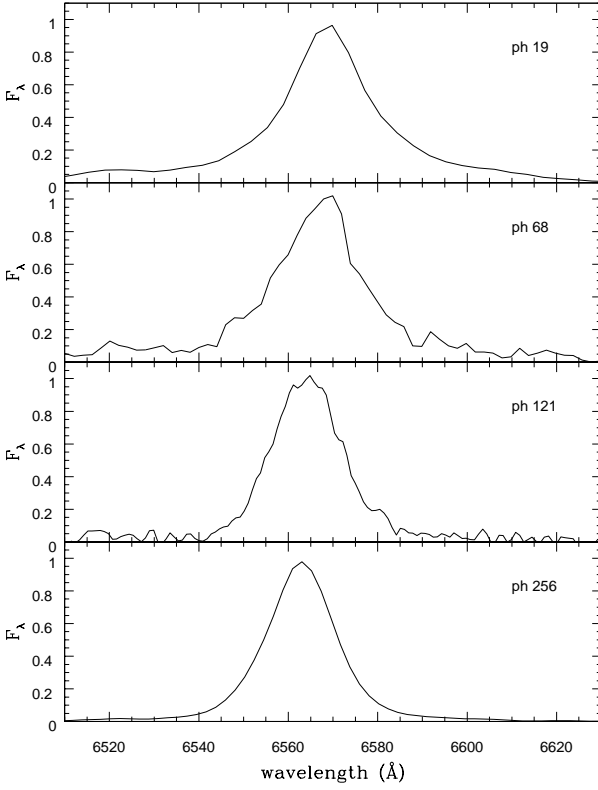


Figure 12. The peak position and profile of H α at 19 days, about 2 months, 4 months and 9 months after the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486). Wavelength is in the observer frame. The flux densities have been normalised to the line peak at each phase.

The mean magnitudes of several of the faintest point sources visible in the vicinity of the SN was $K = 18.3 \pm 0.3$. Hence we adopt $K = 18$ as the sensitivity limit of this frame.

6.2 Spitzer MIR pre explosion images

As discussed in Prieto et al. (2008), several epochs of archival MIR imaging from the Spitzer Space Telescope are available. We analysed IRAC (3.6–8.0 μm) images with the longest integration times from programmes 3249, 20256, and 30292 (P.I. Meikle). Aperture photometry was carried out on the post-BCD images using GAIA. A circular aperture of $2''.0$ was used. Aperture corrections were derived using the point response function frames available from the Spitzer Science Center. The residual background level was measured using a clipped-mean sky estimator, and a concentric sky annulus having inner and outer radii of 1.5 and 2 times the aperture radius, respectively. The resulting flux densities are listed in Table 12 and are consistent with the values reported in Prieto et al. (2008). We used the Auxiliary Port image of SN 2008S and the deep, wide field Gemini i band image to determine the position of SN 2008S on the Spitzer 4.5, 5.8 and 8.0 μm images using differential astrometry. In each case the uncertainty in the positioning of SN 2008S on the Spitzer images was $0''.3$. This uncertainty is a combination in quadrature of the geometric transformation RMS and the uncertainty in the measurement of the centroid of the progenitor object detected by Prieto et al. (2008). The difference between SN 2008S and the progenitor object is $0''.16 \pm 0''.30$ and

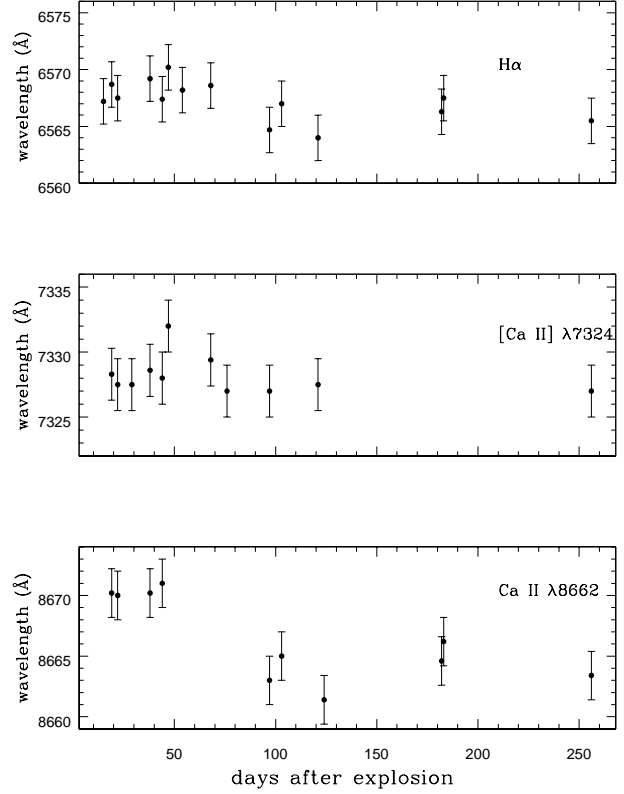


Figure 13. The peak position of H α , [Ca II] ($\lambda 7324$) and Ca II ($\lambda 8662$) as a function of phase. Phase is in days after the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486) and wavelength is in the observer frame.

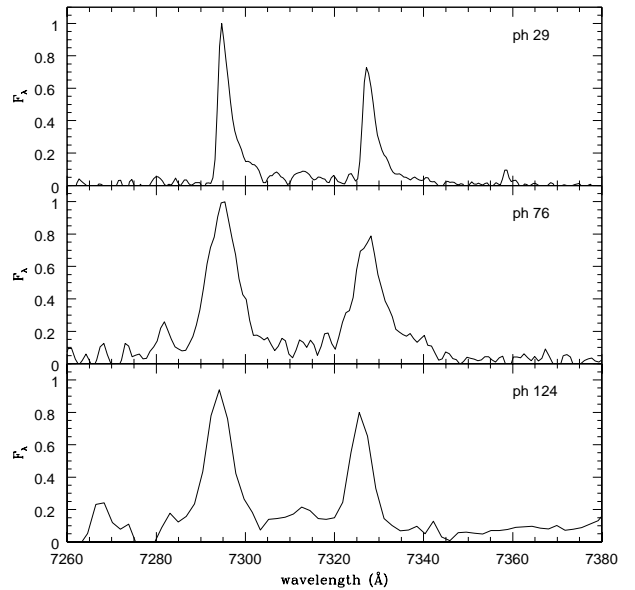


Figure 14. Profile of [Ca II] doublet at about one month, 3 months and 4 months after the explosion epoch (JD 2 454 486). Wavelength is in the observer frame. The flux densities have been normalised to the line peak at each phase.

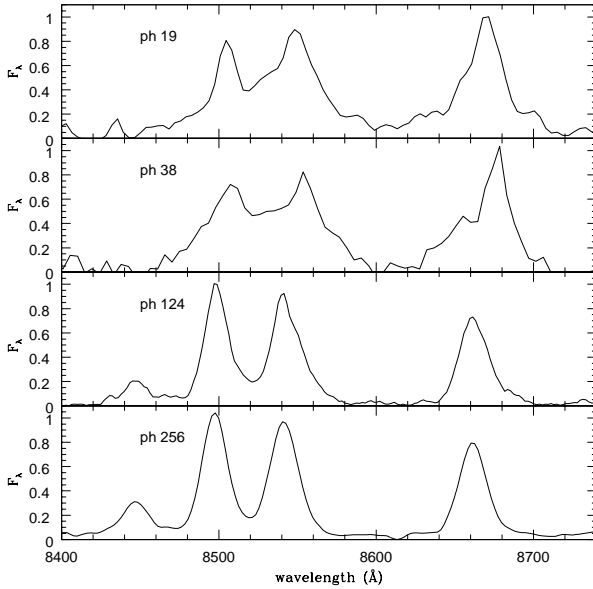


Figure 15. Profile of Ca II NIR triplet at about 20 days, one month, 3 months, 4 months and 9 months after the explosion epoch (JD 2454500). Wavelength is in the observer frame. The flux densities have been normalised to the line peak at each phase.

Table 12. Fluxes and magnitudes measured in the position of SN 2008S on pre-explosion images.

Waveband	Instrument	Flux or magnitude	Units
<i>U</i>	LBT	> 25.1	Vega Mag
<i>B</i>	LBT	> 24.5	Vega Mag
<i>V</i>	LBT	> 24.5	Vega Mag
<i>i</i>	GMOS-N	> 24.4	Vega mag
<i>K'</i>	PISCES	> 18	Vega Mag
3.6 μ m	IRAC	< 3.6	μ Jy
4.5 μ m	IRAC	21.3 ± 1.5	μ Jy
5.8 μ m	IRAC	45.6 ± 2.4	μ Jy
8.0 μ m	IRAC	59.5 ± 4.3	μ Jy

$0''.14 \pm 0''.30$ for the 5.8 and 8.0 μ m images respectively. However, there is a small difference in the position of the progenitor source in the 4.5 μ m image. This is separated from the SN 2008S position by $0''.51 \pm 0''.33$. On close inspection of the images it appears that the source in the 4.5 μ m image may well be extended compared to its 5.6 and 8.0 μ m counterparts (see also Fig. 1 in Prieto et al. 2008,). This might suggest that the 4.5 μ m source is actually a blend of two or more sources. It seems fairly secure that SN 2008S is coincident with the 5.8 and 8.0 μ m sources and we have no evidence to suggest that they are extended or non-stellar. The suggestion that the 4.5 μ m source may be slightly extended could just be due to contamination from nearby, but unrelated flux at this wavelength. But the possibility remains that the source is a blend and this needs to be clarified with late, deep imaging with Spitzer and ground-based high resolution studies.

Prieto et al. (2008) reported aperture photometry for the individual pre-explosion Spitzer epochs. They found no evidence for variability in the flux of the pre-explosion source over the ~ 1000 days covered. Our photometry is based on the combined Spitzer images. To detect possible variability on the source flux we com-

pared the Post-BCD 4.5 μ m images from 2004-11-25 and 2006-08-12 where the pre-explosion source was well detected. We first aligned the images using the centroid coordinates of 13 point-like sources around the pre-explosion source position. The aligned images were matched and subtracted using the ISIS 2.2 (Alard 2000) image subtraction package (for details see also Meikle et al. (2006)). No residual above the noise was apparent in the subtracted image at the pre-explosion source position. This confirms the findings of Prieto et al. (2008) on the lack of variability of the pre-explosion source.

6.3 Analysis of the pre-explosion images

To determine whether the precursor object detected in the Spitzer images is a viable stellar progenitor we modelled the MIR emission using the radiative transfer model DUSTY, in a manner similar to that applied to dusty red supergiants and AGB stars in the LMC by van Loon et al. (2005). In Fig. 17 we show two fits.

In the first case (model *A*) we show a warm circumstellar, spherical, dust shell with $T_{\text{dust}} = 800$ K (at the inner boundary), which has an optical depth of $\tau_V = 150$ ($\tau_{8\mu\text{m}} \sim 2$). We assume that the central exciting source is a blackbody of 3000 K (a cooler temperature does not make a major difference to the MIR output). The outer radius of the shell is 454 AU (2.2 milli-parsec), but its thickness needs to be $R_{\text{outer}}/R_{\text{inner}} < 5$ to fit the SED. The dust in this case consists of silicates with a typical grain size distribution. The inferred luminosity of the central star is $\log L/L_{\odot} \simeq 4.6$ and with such a dense shell all of the stellar energy is absorbed by the dust and hence all appears as reprocessed MIR flux. While this may seem a plausible model and scenario for a dust shell around a massive, embedded star, the extinction toward the central star would be $A_V = 163$ mag. Hence in this case of a spherical, dense (but radially thin) circumstellar shell the optical and K' bands offer no meaningful constraints on the stellar SED. Prieto et al. (2008) suggested a thermally radiating sphere to account for the observed SED (with a blackbody temperature $T_{\text{dust}}=440$ K, $\log L/L_{\odot} \simeq 4.5$, and $R_{\text{BB}} = 150$ AU).

The second case (model *B*) shown in Fig. 17 is a block of optically thick interstellar dust with $A_V = 140$ mag. The extinction law from Cardelli et al. (1989) is used, although this does not fit particularly well around the 8 μ m detection. The extremely high value of extinction would imply densities similar to those in the cores of molecular clouds and the central stellar source would need to be $\log L/L_{\odot} \simeq 6.9$ (again we have assumed a blackbody of 3000 K).

The main problem with either of the above two scenarios is that the extinction we see toward SN2008S can be robustly estimated to be less than $A_V < 4$ mag and is more likely to be of order $A_V = 2.2$ mag. Hence if a spherical dust shell surrounding an exciting source is the explanation for the precursor SED, then the explosion must have destroyed nearly all the dust within the 454 AU shell. Bode & Evans (1980), Wright (1980) and Dwek (1983) have suggested that the UV-optical luminosity from SNe could destroy dust within a spherical cavity around the progenitor star. Additionally UV flashes have been recently observed from type II-P SNe (Gezari et al. 2008; Schawinski et al. 2008). However, these calculations assume a small optical depth, and a more detailed estimate of an optically thick CSM which is evaporated by UV-optical photons within a gamma-ray burst beam has been undertaken by Waxman & Draine (2000). They suggest that a GRB could clear very high column densities of dust (e.g. $A_V \sim 30$ mag) within several parsec of the explosion. Taking these calcula-

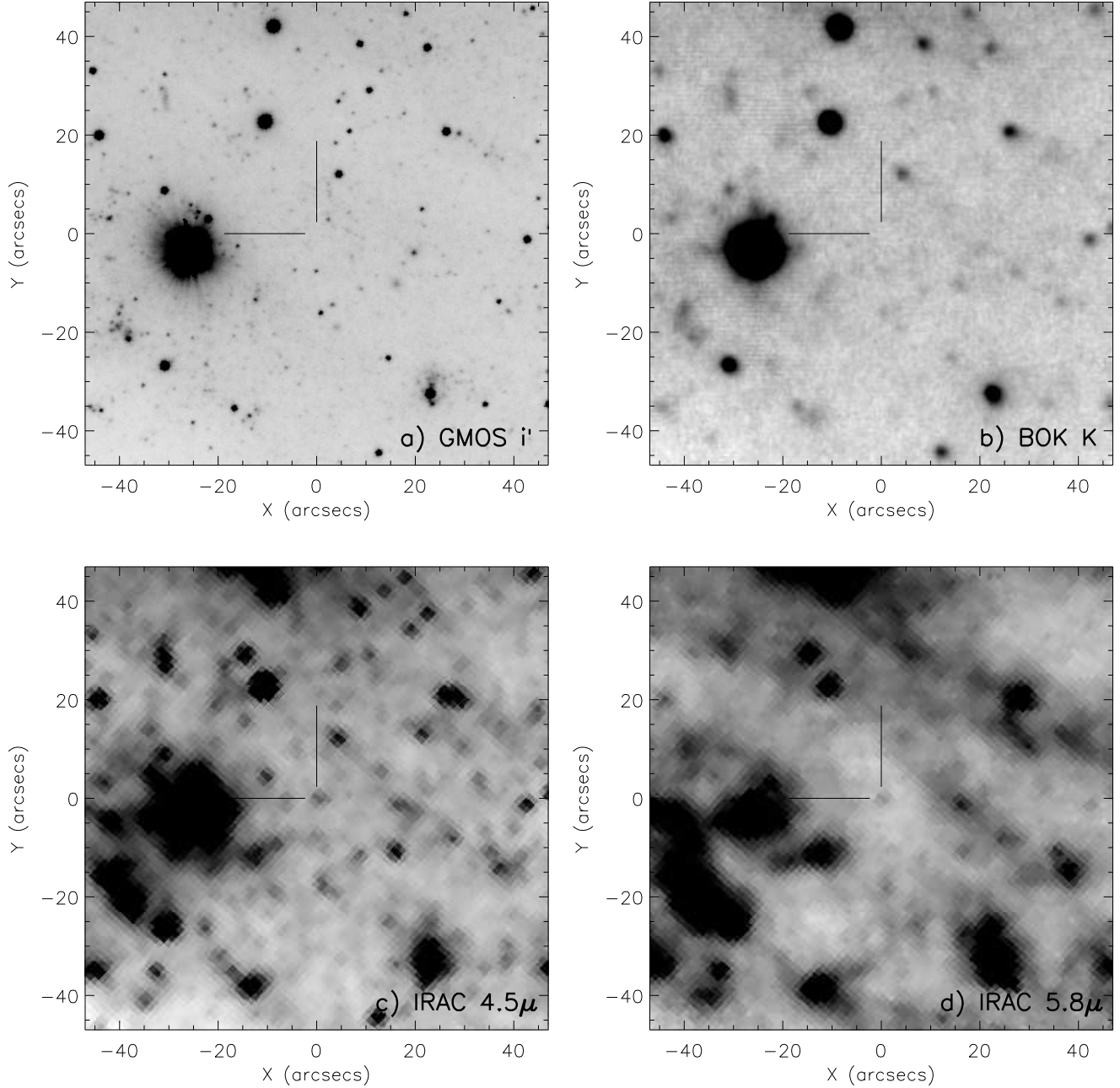


Figure 16. Pre-explosion images of SN 2008S. (a) The Gemini GMOS i' -band image showing no progenitor detection to deep limits. (b) K -band image from the Bok telescope, again showing no detection in the NIR. (c) & (d) : Spitzer images at 4.5 and $5.8\mu\text{m}$, originally presented by Prieto et al (2008). We find some evidence that the $4.5\mu\text{m}$ may be slightly extended. This can only be tested with higher spatial resolution images once the SN fades.

tions, scaling the destruction radius R_d by \sqrt{L} (where for a SN X-ray/UV flash we take $E \sim 10^{46}$ erg, as found in Gezari et al. (2008) and Schawinski et al. (2008)) and reducing the effective flux by the solid angle of the GRB beam in comparison to the isotropic SN energy, a destruction radius of a few milli-parsec is found. In the optically thick regime of Waxman & Draine (2000) the destruction radius does not depend strongly on the density, or A_V , with R_d changing by a factor of less than 2 when n_H changes by a factor 10^5 . Hence it may be feasible for a dust embedded SN to clear a large enough cavity to become relatively unobscured, even at relatively high dust densities.

Prieto et al. (2008) proposed that the properties of the precursor source are very similar to those of dust enshrouded RSG and AGB stars in the LMC as studied by van Loon et al. (2005). All of the carbon stars in van Loon et al. (2005) have $\log L/L_\odot < 4.09$ which is somewhat too low to result in a core-collapse supernova. Smartt et al. (2009) show the lowest luminosity progenitors to be around 4.3 dex and stellar evolutionary models would suggest progenitors of luminosity < 4.1 dex would have initial masses of $5 M_\odot$ or less. Hence these C type stars are not plausible counterparts to the SN 2008S progenitor and are not viable progenitors for a core-collapse SN. More luminous and massive stars than these AGB ob-

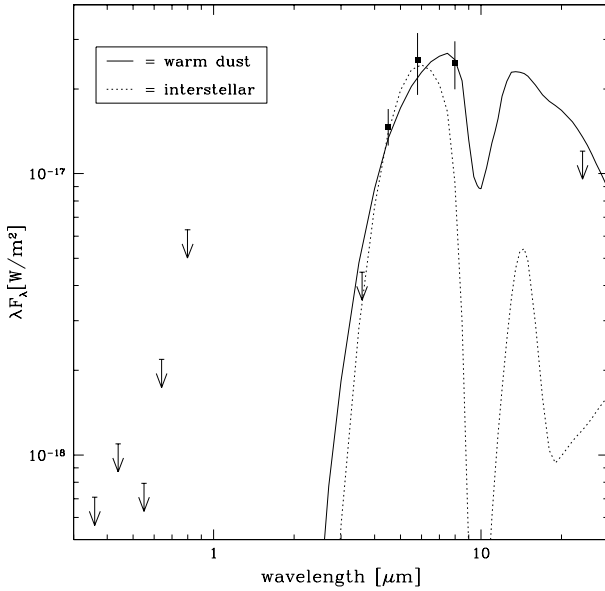


Figure 17. The MIR SED of the SN 2008S progenitor star and the two fits obtained using the radiative transfer model DUSTY. Model A (thin line) consists of a warm circumstellar, spherical, dust shell with $T_{\text{dust}} = 800$ K (at the inner boundary), which has an optical depth of $\tau_V = 150$. Model B (dotted line) consists of a block of optically thick interstellar dust with $A_V = 140$ mag.

jects (which are above the core-collapse threshold) tend to have less optically thick envelopes. For example, IRAS04516–6902 is likely to have $A_V \sim 13$ mag but would be too faint to match the precursor of SN 2008S. In fact all of the LMC red supergiants with luminosities above 4.3 dex would not be bright enough at $8\mu\text{m}$ to account for the observed flux before the explosion of SN 2008S. In addition, many of them would be too bright in the K or I band to be consistent with our observed upper limits (although adjusting the extinction could help hide this shorter wavelength flux).

IRAS 05280-6910 (van Loon et al. 2005) is an extreme case where the star is hardly detectable in the optical and might appear an appealing source for comparison. However in this case the $24\mu\text{m}$ flux of IRAS 05280-6910 would be much brighter than the limit set for the pre-explosion source. Hence we agree that the suggestion of Prieto et al. (2008) of a dust enshrouded red supergiant is initially very appealing, and the dust destruction even at such high column densities does not appear unrealistic. However, we cannot easily match SN 2008S progenitor quantitatively with any of the known dusty red supergiants or AGB stars in the LMC and Galactic samples, in full agreement across the optical and NIR non-detections.

Our conclusions are consistent with the work of Thompson et al. (2008), who show that stars with the same MIR properties as the progenitor of SN 2008S are very rare in the nearby spiral M 33. They find only ~ 10 objects with similar magnitudes and colour which they associate with the high luminosity tail of the AGB sequence. They conclude that this phase is a short period in the lives of a reasonable fraction of massive stars, perhaps linked to large mass ejections and subsequent dust formation episodes in the last $\sim 0.1\%$ of a stellar lifetime. The fact that these types of stars are not common in the LMC studied populations supports this conclusion.

In Fig. 18 we show an HRD with the STARS model tracks of

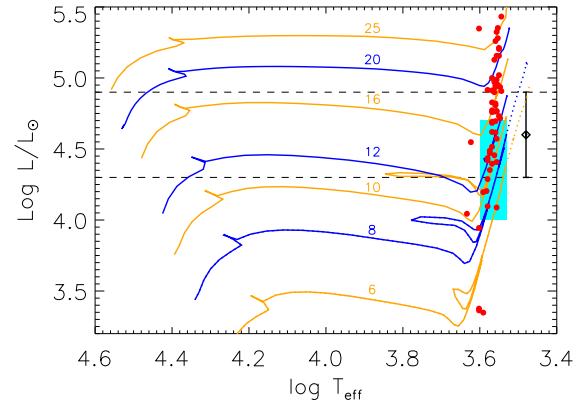


Figure 18. An HR diagram showing the positions of red supergiants in the Galaxy from Levesque et al. (2005) (points) and the region (shaded region) in which red supergiant progenitors of normal II-P SNe have been seen (Smartt et al. 2008). The luminosity of the progenitor of SN 2008S is estimated as $\log L/L_\odot = 4.6 \pm 0.3$, and $T_{\text{eff}} = 3000$ K is consistent with the SED (black point with error bar). However the T_{eff} is unconstrained from the DUSTY model. The dotted lines limit the region of luminosities allowed for the progenitor. The tracks are the STARS models from Eldridge & Tout (2004).

Eldridge & Tout (2004). The positions of Galactic red supergiants are shown (from Levesque et al. 2005) along with the region in which red supergiant progenitors of recent nearby type II-P SNe lie ($\log L/L_\odot = 4.3^{+0.5}_{-0.3}$ Smartt et al. 2009). The luminosity of the progenitor has been estimated at $\log L/L_\odot = 4.6 \pm 0.3$. Although we have estimated the temperature of the exciting source as $T_{\text{eff}} = 3000$ K in the DUSTY model, this number is not well constrained, as a hotter star can be placed inside a denser, geometrically thinner envelope and produce a similar SED. The dotted lines at the extrema of the luminosity ranges show where the progenitor may lie. The tracks of 6–8 M_\odot stars which have gone through 2nd Dredge-up are shown as dotted line. As discussed by Eldridge et al. (2007), many different stellar evolutionary models predict that super-AGB stars (in the 6–9 M_\odot range) that have gone through 2nd dredge-up can rise to higher luminosities and lower effective temperatures than their higher mass counterparts. These stars may be thermally unstable, pulsating, and prone to large mass ejection events. The luminosity of the SN 2008S progenitor star is, within the uncertainties of both the measurements and models, consistent with the position we would expect in the HRD for a 6–8 M_\odot star which has gone through 2nd dredge-up and has developed an O–Ne–Mg core within which electron-capture collapse could occur. The luminosity of the progenitor has been interpreted as an indication of a mass of 10–20 M_\odot (Prieto et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2008; Bond et al. 2009; Berger et al. 2009). However, as seen in Fig. 18, the luminosities of 6–8 M_\odot progenitors after 2nd-dredge up are consistent with the bolometric luminosity of the progenitor of SN 2008S.

So far our analysis has assumed that the pre-explosion MIR source is a single object and not, for example, an embedded cluster of stars within which the progenitor arose. One cannot definitively rule out the latter and we noted above that there is some evidence to suggest that the $4.5\mu\text{m}$ image is extended. However, we would argue that it is unlikely to be a cluster for two reasons. Firstly, the total luminosity is not unusually high for a stellar source, and if it is a cluster that hosted a SN explosion then the progenitor is likely

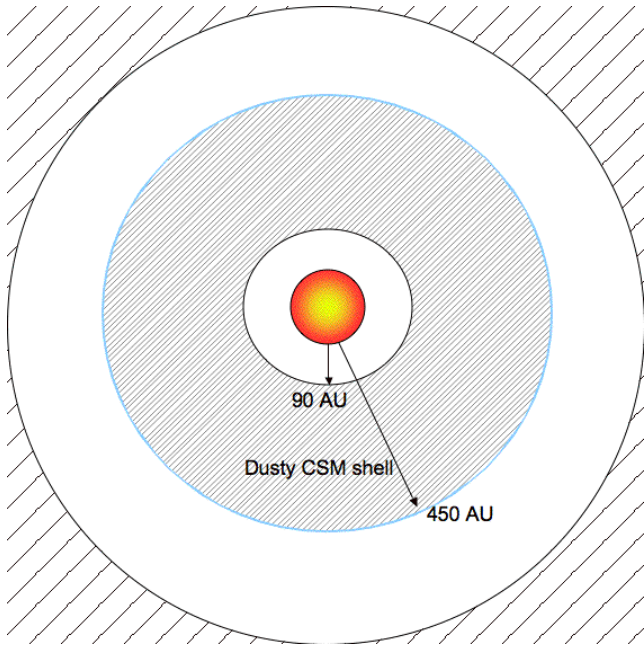


Figure 19. Schematic illustration of the pre-explosion geometry of SN2008S.

the dominant source of flux. Secondly, the cluster would still need to have an extinction similar to that found for the stellar source assumption and the dust would, presumably, be extended over a few parsec (typical cluster size). However, we estimated the likely destruction radius at only a few milli-parsec which seems too small to have an embedded object within a cluster clear the line of sight of intervening dust. The CS dust shell appears to be more plausible.

7 THE NATURE OF SN 2008S

7.1 Pre-explosion CSM

The progenitor analysis suggests the presence of an optically thick shell around SN 2008S with an inner radius of nearly 90AU (Fig. 19). The physical size of the obscuring shell indicates that it is likely circumstellar and the result of a mass loss due to a steady wind rather than eruptive ejection (see also Thompson et al. (2008)). If we assume that the optical depth to the source scales as r^{-1} in a freely expanding wind, τ_V to the progenitor was likely a factor of $\sim 10 - 20$ larger before explosion. All the nearby progenitor dust was likely evaporated in the explosion leaving only the much older dust lying far out in the CSM. In fact the enormous MIR flux observed at 17.3 days may be explained as an IR echo and indicates that a large amount of dust survived, but at a larger radius. The scenario of an evaporated dusty CSM seems plausible. Dust heat capacity is small, making it easy to evaporate if a sufficiently high temperature is reached.

7.2 The photometric and spectroscopic evolution

SN 2008S exhibited a very slow photometric evolution and almost no spectral variability during the first nine months, implying a long photo-diffusion time and a high density CSM (Schlegel 1990). Nevertheless, photometric and spectroscopic observations suggest that there are three distinct phases: the maximum light phase (0-50

days after the explosion), the flattening of $H\alpha$ intensity phase (60-100 days) and the NIR excess phase (from about 120 days). During the first two phases the SN 2008S optical-NIR SED can be fitted with a single blackbody. The blackbody temperature and radius declined monotonically, with temperatures falling from ~ 8000 K to 5000 K.

During the first phase, all spectra showed prominent emission lines of $H\alpha$, the [Ca II] doublet and the Ca II NIR triplet, faint Fe II lines and Na I D and O I in absorption. Some of the Na I D absorption probably has an origin in the CSM, given the observed high density and rapid evolution of the EW during the first month. The only forbidden lines visible in the early spectra are the intense [Ca II] and weak [O I] doublets, likely produced in a region of very low density where the material is slowly moving. We do not detect high velocity absorption lines at any phase, suggesting that the ejecta are not directly visible. The lines do not show a P-Cygni profile typical of a SN explosion at very early phase but exhibit two different kinds of profiles. [Ca II] and Fe II lines show only a narrow asymmetric component with a red wing. The origin of this profile remains unexplained. The $H\alpha$ and Ca II NIR triplet lines show evidence for a multicomponent profile as discussed in Sect. 5.2.

At about 60 days after the explosion the decline of SN 2008S light curves steepened, while the $H\alpha$ intensity remained constant until about 100 days. During this phase the $H\alpha$ narrow component disappeared, while the velocity decline of the broad and intermediate components remained constant. In this phase the [Ca II] profile lost its earlier asymmetry. By about 100 days the initially large redshift of 7 \AA ($\sim 250 \text{ km s}^{-1}$) in the Ca II triplet had practically vanished. There is no robust evidence for comparable shifts in other lines.

The last phase started after about 120 days when a NIR excess appeared and the SED fit required both hot and warm blackbody components. The temperature and radius (and therefore the luminosity) of the hot component showed a slower decline during this phase. The warm component cooled from 1500 K at 160 days to 1200 K at about 300 days, while its radius and luminosity increased. The decline rate of the SN 2008S light curves flattened to 1.3 to 0 mag/100d, depending on the band. The $J - K$ colour continued to increase while other colours showed a much slower evolution. At this epoch the velocity width of the broad component and the intensity of $H\alpha$ declined slower while the velocity width of the intermediate component decreased as in the first phases. The [Ca II]/ $H\alpha$ intensity ratio halved by 260 days while the (Ca II triplet)/ $H\alpha$ declined only slightly. During this later phase the Na I D and O I appeared in emission.

7.3 Comparison with NGC 300 OT2008-1 and M 85 OT2006-1

Several recent papers have suggested an analogy between SN 2008S and two other transients: M 85 OT2006-1 and NGC 300 OT2008-1 (Thompson et al. 2008; Berger et al. 2009; Bond et al. 2009). The progenitors of the SN 2008S and NGC 300 OT2008-1 transients have been detected only on Spitzer pre-explosion images (Prieto et al. 2008; Thompson et al. 2008; Berger et al. 2009) which indicates very similar properties and geometry of the obscuring CSM. Thompson et al. (2008) has proposed that these transients are members of a new class given the similar pre-explosion properties (see Sect. 6.3). The extensive multi-wavelength monitoring campaigns for both these transients (this paper and Smith et al. (2008) for SN 2008S; Berger et al. (2009) and Bond et al. (2009) for NGC 300 OT2008-1) show that they are indeed very simi-

lar in their kinetic and radiative energies. M 85 OT2006-1 had a peak R band absolute magnitude of ~ -12 , a peak luminosity $L_p \sim 2 \times 10^{40} \text{ erg s}^{-1}$ and a total radiated energy in the first two months $E_{ph} \sim 6 \times 10^{46} \text{ erg}$ (Kulkarni et al. 2007), while NGC 300 OT2008-1 had a V band peak of -13 , a luminosity of and a total energy of $\sim 2 \times 10^{47} \text{ erg}$ and no radio or X-ray emission as SN 2008S (Bond et al. 2009; Berger et al. 2009).

The light curves of both transients are very similar to that of SN 2008S although in the latest phases NGC 300 OT2008-1 seems exhibit a steepening (Bond et al. 2009; Berger et al. 2009) and M 85 OT2006-1 faded quickly after the peak phase (Kulkarni et al. 2007), as shown in Fig. 20. In the first phases of its evolution M 85 OT2006-1 showed a warm infrared-bright component likely due to an IR echo by circumstellar dust surviving the explosion (Prieto et al. 2008). The spectra of both M 85 OT2006-1 and NGC 300 OT2008-1 showed Balmer lines, [Ca II] and Ca II triplet lines (Kulkarni et al. 2007; Pastorello et al. 2007; Bond et al. 2009; Berger et al. 2009). Moreover, in NGC 300 OT2008-1 He I (in emission), and Ca H&K and OI $\lambda 8446$ (in absorption) are visible while M 85 OT2006-1 showed also prominent K I lines. The width of the narrow H α component is very similar in SN 2008S and NGC 300 OT2008-1, while in M 85 OT2006-1 is narrower.

Smith et al. (2008) have interpreted SN 2008S as a SN impostor analogous to the eruptions of LBVs. They proposed that SN 2008S was a super Eddington outburst of a star of about $20 M_\odot$, highly obscured because an outburst which had occurred shortly after the recent blue loop transition. However, a $20 M_\odot$ star has a luminosity of $\log L/L_\odot \simeq 5.0 - 5.3$ which is not consistent with the total MIR luminosity of the progenitor of $\log L/L_\odot \simeq 4.6$ derived from the analysis of the pre-explosion images. Smith et al. (2008) also suggested that the spectral similarity of SN 2008S in outburst with the hypergiant IRC+10420 might indicate that SN 2008S was also a star of similar evolutionary state. However, the similarity between the SN 2008S and IRC+10420 spectra only points to similar physical conditions of the regions where the emission lines form. The fact that the T_{eff} of the continuum of SN 2008S decreases dramatically, while the emission-line spectrum does not evolve, suggests that the lines are not formed in a stellar like expanding photosphere. IRC+10420, in its quiescent phase, has a luminosity 20 times higher than that of the MIR progenitor but 50 times lower than that of SN 2008S at maximum. At peak, SN 2008S has a radius of $3000 R_\odot$ compared to a likely radius of IRC+10420 of $420 R_\odot$. Finally IRC+10420 is not enshrouded by a dusty shell and likely has a different mass loss history with respect to that of progenitors of these transients. Overall, a physical or evolutionary link between possible LBV-like outbursts of stars such as IRC+10420 and SN 2008S does not seem convincing to us. As an explanation for NGC 300 OT2008-1, Berger et al. (2009) and Bond et al. (2009) also favour a stellar eruption which is not unlike that proposed by Smith et al. (2008). But nevertheless, the issues discussed above still argue against this interpretation for SN 2008S.

In contrast Thompson et al. (2008) compared the MIR properties of known LBVs in M 33 to the progenitors of SN 2008S and NGC 300 OT2008-1 and claimed that a LBV explanation is unlikely for these transients since the LBV luminosity is higher and the LBV MIR colours are much bluer than those of the two transients. Moreover, they stressed that the time scale of the LBV variability is not consistent with the lack of variability of the MIR progenitors. We would agree that this is an evidence against the stellar eruption scenario, at least in any LBV or LBV-like event.

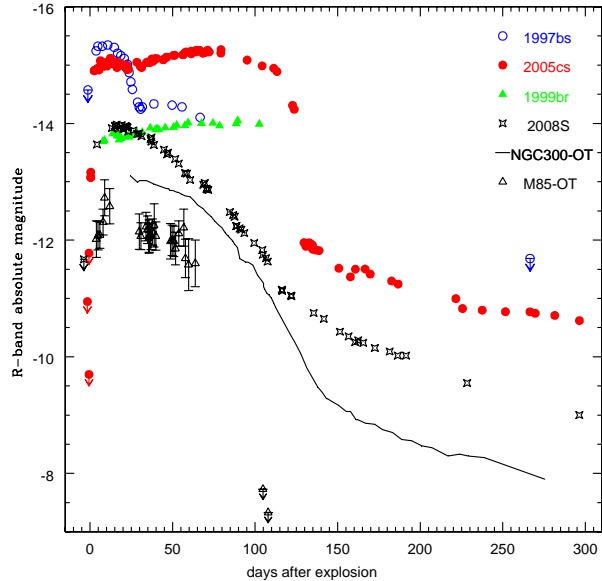


Figure 20. Comparison between light curves of the transients SN 2008S, M85 OT2006-1 (Kulkarni et al. 2007), NGC 300 OT2008-1 (Bond et al. 2009), the subluminal type II-P SN 1999br (Pastorello et al. 2004) and SN 2005cs (Pastorello et al. 2006; Tsvetkov et al. 2006; Pastorello et al. 2009), and the SN impostor SN 1997bs (Van Dyk et al. 2000).

7.4 Comparison with SN 1998S and SN 1979C

The optical light curves of SN 2008S are surprisingly similar to those of type II n SN 1998S and type II-L SN 1979C (Fig. 21), although SN 1998S ($M_B = -19.6$ Fassia et al. 2000) and SN 1979C ($M_B = -19.4$ Panagia et al. 1980) were much more luminous. In the NIR bands the decline rates of SN 2008S at ~ 170 days after the explosion are similar to those of slowly declining CC SNe templates of Mattila & Meikle (2001) based on SN 1979C and SN 1998S at the same epoch ($J \sim 0.9 \text{ mag}/100\text{d}$, $H \sim 0.3 \text{ mag}/100\text{d}$ and $K \sim 0 \text{ mag}/100\text{d}$).

In Fig. 21 the R band and $UBVRIJHK$ quasi-bolometric light curves of SN 2008S are compared with those of SN 1998S, while in Fig. 22 the evolution of the $B - V$, $V - R$ and $V - K$ colours is shown for SN 2008S and SN 1998S. The result of this comparison is intriguing: the overall photometric evolution of these events is very similar, the only two differences being the absolute luminosity and a broader peak for SN 2008S.

Given the similarity with SN 1998S and SN 1979C and assuming that radioactive material was also powering the late time photometric evolution of SN 2008S, we tried to estimate the ^{56}Ni mass synthesized by SN 2008S by comparing its $UBVRIJHK$ quasi-bolometric light curve with that of SN 1987A from 100 to 200 days after explosion and assuming similar γ -ray deposition fraction:

$$M(^{56}\text{Ni})_{08S} = M(^{56}\text{Ni})_{87A} \times \frac{L_{08S}}{L_{87A}} M_\odot \quad (1)$$

where $M(^{56}\text{Ni})_{87A}$ is the mass of ^{56}Ni produced by SN 1987A, L_{08S} is the luminosity of SN 2008S and L_{87A} is the luminosity of SN 1987A (at a similar epoch) also obtained from $UBVRIJHK$ data. We adopt $M(^{56}\text{Ni})_{87A} = 0.073 \pm 0.012 M_\odot$ which is the weighted mean of values given by Arnett & Fu (1989) and by Bouchet et al. (1991). For SN 2008S we obtain a $M(^{56}\text{Ni})$ of

$0.0015 \pm 0.0004 M_{\odot}$ where the error includes both the uncertainties in the assumed distance of SN 2008S and in the ^{56}Ni mass of SN 1987A. If we considered only optical data for both SN 2008S and SN 1987A we would obtain a $M(^{56}\text{Ni})$ of $0.0011 \pm 0.0003 M_{\odot}$. We estimated the ^{56}Ni mass also using the method of Hamuy (2003) assuming that all the γ -rays resulting from the decay of ^{56}Co into ^{56}Fe are fully thermalized:

$$M(^{56}\text{Ni})_{08S} = 7.866 \times 10^{-44} \text{Le}^{\frac{(t-t_0)/(1+z) - \tau_{\text{Ni}}}{\tau_{\text{Co}}}} M_{\odot} (2)$$

where t_0 is the explosion epoch, $\tau_{\text{Ni}} = 8.76$ days the life time of ^{56}Ni and $\tau_{\text{Co}} = 111.26$ days is the life time of ^{56}Co . Using this method we estimated $M(^{56}\text{Ni})$ for each point of the radioactive tail and the average of these estimates gives an ejected ^{56}Ni mass of $0.0016 \pm 0.0003 M_{\odot}$. We remark that the estimated value of ^{56}Ni mass has to be considered as an upper limit if the ejecta-CSM interaction or an IR echo contributes to the tail of the bolometric light curve. This ^{56}Ni mass is marginally lower than that observed in low luminosity type II-P SNe ($2 - 8 \times 10^{-3} M_{\odot}$ Turatto et al. 1998; Benetti et al. 2001; Pastorello et al. 2004), but is close enough that SN 2008S could be an extension of these low-energy explosions. However, there are two important differences between SN 2008S and subluminal type II-P SNe: the SN 2008S light curves do not show any plateau phase, and the SN 2008S spectral lines do not show P-Cygni absorption features. Hydrodynamical modelling of type II-L SNe has suggested three quite different evolutionary scenarios and explosion mechanisms. Swartz et al. (1991) modeled the collapse of a O-Ne-Mg star, suggesting the electron capture as a mechanism for II-L SNe. Blinnikov & Bartunov (1993) proposed a large supergiant progenitor, while Young et al. (2005) presented a two component model of a GRB afterglow with underlying SN ejecta. However, there is still not a clear consensus on the bright type II_n and II-L events such as SNe 1998S and 1979C.

The spectral evolution of SN 1979C and SN 1998S is quite different with respect to that of SN 2008S but there are some common characteristics. Both SN 1979C and SN 1998S showed strong emission lines and absence of P-Cygni profiles during the first months after the discovery (Fassia et al. 2000; Branch et al. 1981). The $H\alpha$ profile exhibits broad wings around a narrow core. An explanation for such line profiles which lack absorption components is electron scattering in a dense CS shell lying beyond the SN photosphere and being characterized by a Thomson optical depth of $\sim 3 - 4$ (Chugai 2001). We compare the $H\alpha$ profiles of SN 1998S and SN 2008S in Fig. 23. The high density of the CS shell in the case of SN 1998S implies that a cool dense shell (CDS) forms at the interface of SN ejecta and the CSM. The absence of broad P-Cygni profiles was explained with obscuration by the CDS. Fassia et al. (2001) showed that absorption troughs appeared in the spectra of 1998S after only 12 days, and suggested that the SN ejecta had over-run the inner CS by that point.

The early spectra of SN 1998S showed Balmer lines, He I, He II, C III and N III all indicative of CSM interaction. The first spectra of SN 1979C showed emission lines of $H\alpha$, $H\beta$, the Ca II NIR triplet, the [Ca II] doublet and Mg II ($\lambda 2798$). Branch et al. (1981) suggested that all these lines were collisionally excited.

SN 1998S and SN 1979C have been suggested to be the results of explosions of a red supergiant with an extended envelope, $R \sim (1 - 10) \times 10^3 R_{\odot}$, and a moderate mass of ejecta $\sim 5 M_{\odot}$. Chugai (2001) suggested also that the origin of the CS shell around SN 1998S may be a violent mass loss during the Ne and O burning in cores of $\sim 11 M_{\odot}$.

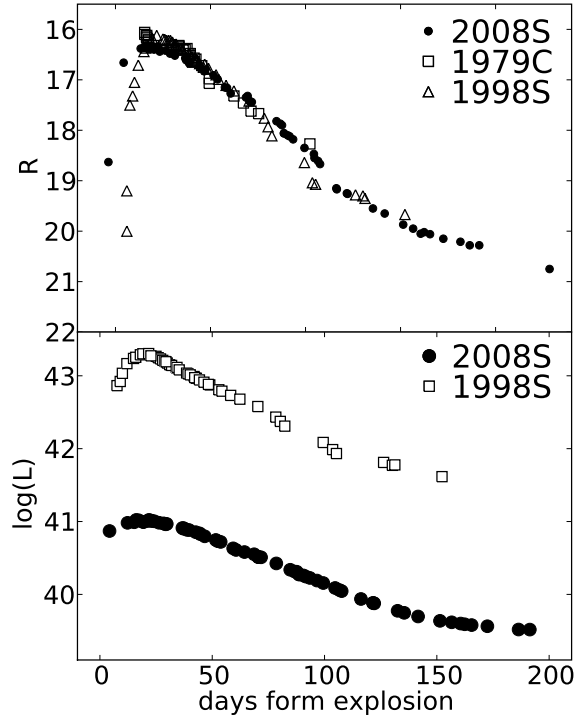


Figure 21. Comparison between light curves of SN 2008S (filled symbols), SN 1998S (empty triangles) (Liu et al. 2000; Fassia et al. 2001) and SN 1979C (empty squares) (Balinskaia et al. 1980; de Vaucouleurs et al. 1981; Barbon et al. 1982): in the top panel the R band light curves (the SN 1998S and SN 1979C light curves are both shifted by 4 mag) and in the bottom panel the quasi bolometric light curves of SN 2008S and SN 1998S. Phase is in days after the explosion epoch (JD 2 450 869 for SN 1998S, JD 2 443 979 for SN 1979C and JD 2 454 486 for SN 2008S).

7.5 SN 2008S: an electron capture SN

An alternative explanation of SN 2008S (and by implication NGC 300 OT2008-1 and M 85 OT2006-1) is the explosion of a massive star in a low, or moderate, energetic SN. We show that the observed characteristics of SN 2008S and its progenitor share characteristics that are common to models of electron-capture supernovae (ECSNe). Such models have been developed extensively in the last three decades. The strongest evidence for this interpretation is based on the observational discovery that the light curve tail of SN 2008S follows the decay rate of ^{56}Co . The observation of ^{56}Ni and ^{56}Co decay can be used to distinguish between a SN explosion and multiple shell interaction scenarios (Dessart et al. 2008). The tail phase luminosity decay rate is a strong argument that ^{56}Ni was produced by SN 2008S, and there is no physical channel to produce this radioactive isotope other than explosive burning of oxygen and silicon at temperatures in excess of $\sim 10^9$ K.

A star in the mass range of $\sim 8 - 10 M_{\odot}$ can form an electron degenerate O-Ne-Mg core during the final stage, as it becomes a super-AGB star (Ritossa et al. 1999; Siess 2007; Eldridge & Tout 2004). Super-AGB stars may end their lives either as massive O-Ne-Mg white dwarfs or as ECSN before Ne ignition (Miyaji et al. 1980; Nomoto 1984; Hillebrandt et al. 1984; Baron et al. 1987; Mayle & Wilson 1988; Poelarends et al. 2008; Wanajo et al. 2003, 2008). The final fate of super-AGB stars depends on the com-

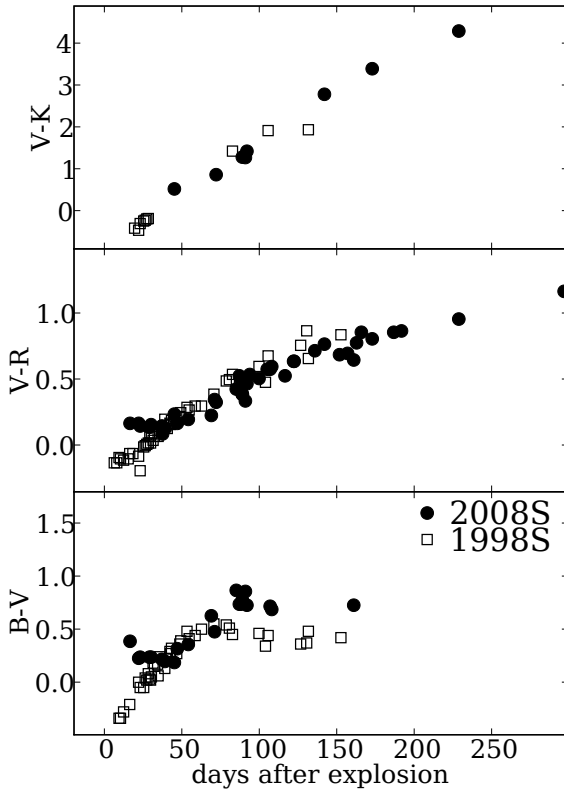


Figure 22. Comparison between $V - K$, $V - R$ and $B - V$ colours of SN 2008S (filled symbols) and SN 1998S (empty symbols). The colours of SN 1998S are corrected for $A_{B,Gal} = 0.86$ and $A_{B,int} = 0.09$. Phase is in days after the explosion epoch (JD 2 450 869 for SN 1998S, JD 2 443 979 for SN 1979C and JD 2 454 486 for SN 2008S).

peting effects of core growth and mass loss during the late evolutionary stages, particularly during carbon burning. If the core mass reaches the Chandrasekhar mass, high pressure and density lead to electron capture onto ^{24}Mg and ^{20}Ne , the electron degeneracy pressure decreases and the core may collapse before an iron core is formed (Miyaji et al. 1980; Miyaji & Nomoto 1987; Hashimoto et al. 1993; Poelarends et al. 2008; Wanajo et al. 2008). If the mass-loss rate is high enough the envelope is lost before the core reaches the Chandrasekhar mass and the star ends its life as an O-Ne-Mg white dwarf.

Nomoto (1984, 1987) estimated that stars with a mass of $8 - 10 M_{\odot}$ can become ECSNe but recent work has suggested a more narrow mass range (Siess 2007; Poelarends et al. 2008) and a lower mass limit of $\sim 9 M_{\odot}$. Podsiadlowski et al. (2004) suggested that the initial mass range may be wider if one considers binary systems, about $8 - 11 M_{\odot}$. ECSNe and their progenitors are predicted to show three properties that might allow us to distinguish them from ordinary CCSNe: they might produce low energy explosions; the enormous mass-loss rate of the SN progenitor star in the super-AGB phase may produce signatures of CSM interaction in the light curve; the ECSN progenitors have luminosities of the order of $10^5 L_{\odot}$ and cool effective temperatures (Eldridge et al. 2007).

All these characteristics appear consistent with SN 2008S and its progenitor star. The progenitor of SN 2008S is too faint to be a

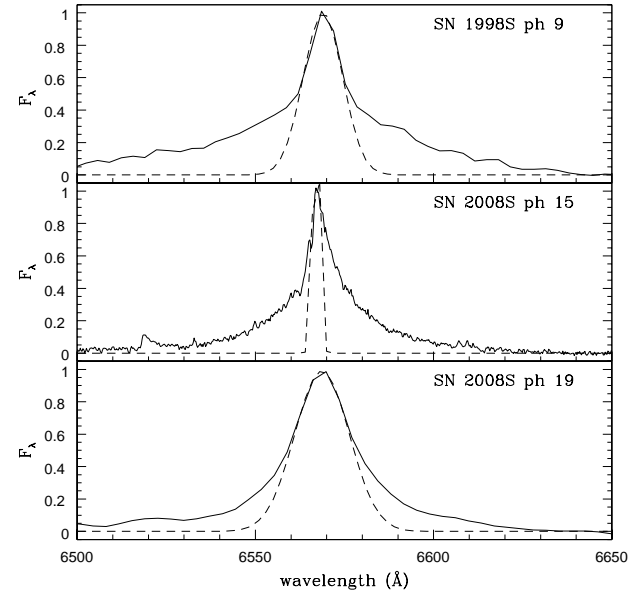


Figure 23. Comparison between $H\alpha$ profiles in SN 1998S (phase 9 days) and SN 2008S at two different phases (15 and 19 days). Phase is in days after the explosion epoch (JD 2 450 869 for SN 1998S and JD 2 454 486 for SN 2008S). Wavelength is in the observer frame. A Gaussian profile that matches the line peak is shown as a dashed line.

luminous red supergiant, and too bright to be an intermediate-mass AGB star. It could thus be a massive AGB star, a super-AGB star ($\sim 8 M_{\odot}$), or a "low-mass" (close to $\sim 8 M_{\odot}$) red supergiant. One argument in favour of a super-AGB star progenitor, is that low-mass red supergiants generally do not lose mass fast enough to avoid exploding as a red supergiant, by far. So they still have massive mantles, but fairly diluted circumstellar envelopes. AGB stars and super-AGB stars lose mass at high rate for longer prior to their ends, which in case of AGB stars means they lose their mantles before core collapse could occur whereas in super-AGB stars it's a race between mass loss and core growth that determines who wins. The stellar mantle prior to explosion would be thin anyway, one would expect, and the circumstellar medium would be dense. Thompson et al. (2008) suggested that the ECSN was a viable explanation for these SN 2008S-like objects based on the progenitor properties. The energetics of the events and their evolution now add weight to this argument. Moreover Swartz et al. (1991), as already discussed in the previous section, suggested that the ECSN progenitor (super-AGB stars) may lose a large fraction of their envelope and become a type II-L SNe.

An important implication of the low explosion energy is a small ^{56}Ni mass produced by the explosion. In ECSN explosion models, Kitaura et al. (2006) estimated an explosion energy of $1-2 \times 10^{50}$ erg, a Ni mass of about $10^{-2} M_{\odot}$, and an ejecta velocity after the shock breakout from the stellar surface of $\leq 3000 \text{ km s}^{-1}$. The estimated values of energy and ^{56}Ni mass in SN 2008S are somewhat lower than the prediction from Kitaura et al. (2006), but more recent models of ECSNe by Wanajo et al. (2008) are closer to the observed properties of SN 2008S. These weak explosions give an ejected ^{56}Ni mass of $0.002-0.004 M_{\odot}$. These progenitors have O-Ne-Mg cores of an initial mass of $8.8 M_{\odot}$.

The wind speed inferred from the narrow component of $H\alpha$ (about 200 km s^{-1}), which has likely CSM as origin, has

a larger velocity width than is seen normally in AGB stars, although such velocities are not unprecedented in post-AGB stars. Weaver & Woosley (1979) suggested that the super-AGB stars might produce strong flashes in the semi-degenerate core a few years prior to a SN explosion, and the strongest flash could eject most of the H envelope with velocities of $\sim 100 \text{ km s}^{-1}$. This strong mass loss is an obvious way to account for the optically thick shell around SN 2008S and NGC 300 OT2008-1. Super-AGB stars, or ECSN progenitors, may be distinguished from very massive progenitors of similar luminosity by their much cooler effective temperatures ($\leq 3000 \text{ K}$ for ECSN vs. $\sim 3400 \text{ K}$ for CCSN progenitors (Wanajo et al. 2008)). The exciting star in the DUSTY model described above has a temperature of 3000 K , hence consistent with cool super-AGB stars (Eldridge et al. 2007). It is interesting to note that the Crab remnant has also been suggested to have originated in an ECSN given the low kinetic energy and a small amount of α elements (Nomoto et al. 1982; Chevalier 1984).

Finally the rate of these types of transients would be a useful guide to their physical origins. Wanajo et al. (2008) suggest, from nucleosynthesis arguments, that ECSNe must be $\leq 30\%$ of all CCSN events, while Poelarends et al. (2008) suggest that they should be somewhat rarer ($\sim 7\text{--}8\%$) if they come from a narrow mass range. Thompson et al. (2008) propose that there are possibly 4 known events that are similar, and that their faint peak magnitudes mean that many more may be undiscovered in the Local Universe. The local SN sample compiled by Smartt et al. (2009) shows 92 CCSNe within a local 28 Mpc volume, within a 10.5 yr period. At least there are 4 candidates which are SN2008S-like, as discussed in Thompson et al. (2008). Hence a lower limit to the rate of these events of $\geq 5\%$ can be inferred, which is not inconsistent with the arguments from theory.

8 CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the combination of our monitoring data and the evidence from the progenitor studies suggest that a weak SN explosion of a massive star with an initial mass around $6\text{--}10 M_{\odot}$ in the super-AGB stage is a plausible explanation for SN 2008S. By implication NGC 300 OT2008-1 and M 85 OT2006-1 are likely of similar origin. The weak explosion could be due to core-collapse through the electron-capture SN mechanism.

The progenitor star was not a normal red supergiant which should produce the standard type II-P SNe (Smartt et al. 2009). However, if the pre-explosion MIR flux reflects the stellar photospheric flux, the object has a luminosity similar to models of super-AGB stars. Extremely high mass-loss rates could create circumstellar shells which are optically thick, cool, dense and dusty (Thompson et al. 2008). Such high mass-loss through thermal pulses has been predicted by theory and obscured massive oxygen-rich AGB stars are certainly observed by (van Loon et al. 2005).

The evidence that SN 2008S was indeed a SN explosion comes from three observations. Firstly, SN 2008S is similar in the total radiated energy to other faint SNe, and it shows moderate velocities of about 3000 km s^{-1} . The latter are hard to reconcile with either an LBV-like or non-destructive stellar eruption. Secondly, we detect a tail phase which has a decay slope matching that of radioactive ^{56}Co . We estimate the mass of ^{56}Ni ejected to be $0.0015 \pm 0.0004 M_{\odot}$, which is similar to the faintest known type II-P SNe ($\sim 0.002 M_{\odot}$). Finally, Wanajo et al. (2008) have presented models of electron capture supernovae of progenitor AGB

stars with an O-Ne-Mg core and an initial mass of $8.8 M_{\odot}$ that are in plausible agreement with SN 2008S and similar transients. These weak explosions, as also discussed by Kitaura et al. (2006), give an ejected ^{56}Ni mass of $0.002\text{--}0.004 M_{\odot}$. SN 2008S is also significant in that it has allowed the earliest ever MIR observation of a SN, and the remarkably large flux detected confirms the presence of substantial circumstellar material around the progenitor star. In addition, SN 2008S developed a NIR excess at later times. This can be interpreted as optically thin thermal emission from $\sim 10^{-6} M_{\odot}$ of amorphous carbon grains or $\sim 10^{-5} M_{\odot}$ of silicate grains. However, larger masses of grains, which would be optically thick, are not ruled out. The grain location and heating mechanisms are uncertain. While some of the NIR emission may originate in new, radioactively-heated ejecta grains, the magnitude of the later NIR flux requires that at least a proportion must come from an additional source. This might be reverse shock heating of new ejecta grains. Alternatively it might be due to shock heating of new (CDS) dust or old dust in the circumstellar region.

Our suggested scenario can be tested in the future. If the star has cataclysmically exploded as a SN, then, once the remnant fades, there should be no source left with a luminosity similar to the progenitor ($10^{4.6} L_{\odot}$). This needs to be tested over the entire optical to MIR wavelength range to ensure that no progenitor star remains, whether exposed or concealed by newly-formed dust. In addition, if the SN ejecta become visible, one might expect to see broad lines of forbidden oxygen (e.g. [O I] $\lambda\lambda$ 6300, 6364) and other intermediate mass elements. This may be difficult, as the events are intrinsically faint, but it could be possible in particular for NGC 300 OT2008-1 as its distance is only 2 Mpc and hence it can be monitored for a long time. The tail phase, following the ^{56}Co decay, should continue at least for another ~ 300 days, and the slope of this decay should be monitored closely in both SN 2008S and NGC 300 OT2008-1. Finally the true rate of these transients will give further insights into their nature, and deeper searches by future sky surveys may discover more of these events (Young et al. 2008).

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by the Osservatorio di Padova INAF. The 2.2m telescope is operated jointly by the Max-Planck-Institut für Astronomie (MPIA) in Heidelberg, Germany, and the Instituto de Astrofísica de Andalucía (CSIC) in Granada/Spain in the Centro Astronómico Hispano Alemán at Calar Alto. We are grateful to the support astronomers at these telescopes for performing the follow up observations of SN 2008S in particular to P. Rodríguez Gil at Isaac Newton Group of Telescopes, V.P. Goranskij at SAO and T.R. Irsambetova at SAI Crimean laboratory. Moreover, we are grateful to U. Hopp for arranging the observations at the Wendelstein Observatory and to M. Dolci and E. Di Carlo for arranging observations at Osservatorio di Campo Imperatore. We thank the members of the LBT partnership who contributed to the Science Demonstration Time observation and J. Knapen for the images of the Bok telescope. This work is based in part on archival data obtained with the Spitzer Space Telescope and made use of the NASA/IPAC Extragalactic Database (NED), which are operated by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology under a contract with National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Support for this work was provided by an award issued by JPL/Caltech. We also exploited data products from the Two Micron All Sky Survey (2MASS), which is a joint project of the University of Massachusetts and the Infrared Processing and Analysis center/California Institute of Technology, funded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the National Science Foundation. We acknowledge the usage of the HyperLeda database (<http://leda.univ-lyon1.fr>).

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APPENDIX A: DATA TABLES

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Table A1. Magnitudes of the local sequence stars in the field of SN2008S.

ID	U	B	V	R	I
1	16.41 ± 0.04	16.29 ± 0.04	15.45 ± 0.02	14.97 ± 0.02	14.46 ± 0.05
2	14.56 ± 0.02	14.29 ± 0.02	13.55 ± 0.02	13.13 ± 0.01	12.77 ± 0.02
3	18.35 ± 0.04	17.85 ± 0.03	16.85 ± 0.02	16.30 ± 0.03	15.75 ± 0.03
4	14.77 ± 0.02	14.50 ± 0.02	13.76 ± 0.01	13.34 ± 0.02	12.95 ± 0.03
6	16.83 ± 0.03	16.61 ± 0.03	15.80 ± 0.02	15.32 ± 0.03	14.83 ± 0.02
7	17.94 ± 0.04	17.62 ± 0.04	16.68 ± 0.03	16.16 ± 0.02	15.58 ± 0.02
12	16.79 ± 0.03	16.60 ± 0.02	15.83 ± 0.02	15.37 ± 0.02	14.89 ± 0.01
13	18.41 ± 0.05	17.57 ± 0.04	16.43 ± 0.03	15.75 ± 0.02	15.14 ± 0.02
16	15.87 ± 0.02	15.59 ± 0.02	14.74 ± 0.02	14.27 ± 0.03	13.81 ± 0.03
17	17.88 ± 0.03	17.71 ± 0.04	16.91 ± 0.04	16.45 ± 0.03	15.97 ± 0.03
19	16.13 ± 0.02	15.78 ± 0.02	14.85 ± 0.02	14.34 ± 0.02	13.88 ± 0.02
20	19.89 ± 0.06	18.12 ± 0.05	16.86 ± 0.03	15.99 ± 0.03	15.32 ± 0.03
21	16.75 ± 0.04	16.37 ± 0.03	15.49 ± 0.02	14.99 ± 0.02	14.53 ± 0.02
22	16.55 ± 0.03	16.44 ± 0.03	15.66 ± 0.02	15.21 ± 0.02	14.74 ± 0.02
23		15.56 ± 0.02	13.82 ± 0.03	13.35 ± 0.03	12.91 ± 0.03
26		14.55 ± 0.03	14.38 ± 0.02	13.70 ± 0.02	13.09 ± 0.02

Table A2. Emission features observed on SN 2008S spectra.

Identification	Rest Wavelength (Å)	Observed Wavelength (Å)	Notes
H_{δ}	4101	4103	blend
FeII (28)	4178.85	4182	blend
FeII (27)	4385.38	4387	
FeII (37)	4472.92	4475	
FeII (37)	4491	4493	
FeII (38)	4508.28	4511	blend
FeII (37)	4520	4522	
FeII (38)	4541.52	4543	blend
FeII (38)	4549.47	4553	
FeII (38)	4576.331	4578	
FeII (38)	4583.829	4586	
FeII (38)	4620.5	4622	
FeII (186)	4635.3	4637	
H_{β}	4861	4867	blend
FeII (42)	4923.92	4926	
FeII (42)	5018.43	5020	
FeII (42)	5169.0	5172	
FeII (49)	5197.56	5199	
FeII (49)	5234	5237	
FeII (49)	5254.9	5257	
FeII (48)	5264.8	5267	
FeII (49)	5275.99	5277	
FeII (49)	5316.6	5318	
FeII (49)	5325.5	5328	
FeII (48)	5337.71	5340	
FeII (49)	5425.3	5428	
NaI	5890 5896	5892	
FeII (46)	5991.38	5995	
FeII (46)	6084.11	6089	
FeII (46)	6113.33	6116	
FeII (74)	6238.38-6239.9	6243	blend
FeII (74) + FeII (92)	6247.55 -6248.89	6250	blend
[OI]	6300.23	6304	
[OI]	6363.88	6368	
FeII (40)+ FeII (93)	6369.5-6371	6372	
FeII (74)	6416.9	6418	
FeII (40)+ FeII (199)	6432.7- 6433.9	6433-6440	blend
FeII (74)	6456.38	6456-6461	blend
FeII (92)+ FeII (92)	6491.2 + 6493.035	6492-6496	blend
FeII (40)+ FeII (92)	6516.1 + 6517.0	6519	blend
H_{α}	6563.5	6568	
[FeII](14)	7155.14	7159	?
FeII (73)	7222.39	7226	
FeII (73)	7224.51	7228	
[CaII]	7291	7295	
FeII (73)	7310.24	7313	
[CaII]	7324	7327	
MnII (4)	7353.52	7358	?
MnII (4)	7415.80	7420	?
MnII (4)	7432.27	7438	?
FeII (73)	7449.3	7453	blend
FeII (73)	7462.38	7465	
FeII (73)	7515.9	7520	
FeII (72)	7533.42	7538	
FeII (73)	7711.71	7716	
CaII (2)	8498	8505	
CaII (2)	8542	8547	
CaII (2)	8662.14	8669	
OI (1)	7771.96+7774.18+7775.40	7779	
OI (4)	8446.35		ph 256

